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**Vol. 10**

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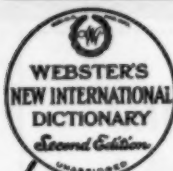
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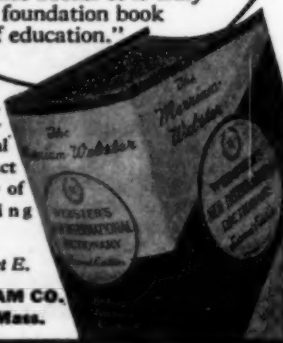
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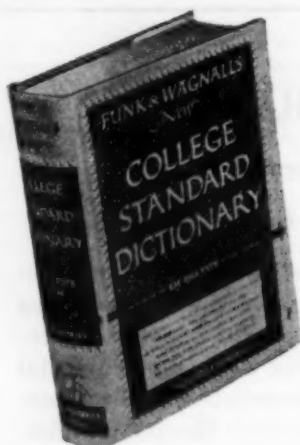
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Volume 10

MARCH 1949

Number 6

## *Delta Revival*

JOHN W. WILSON<sup>\*</sup>

### I

AN ABUNDANT second crop of the fertile Delta country of Mississippi nowadays is books. Cotton no longer holds undisputed sway as the major product of the region, and the rich soil is paying off with more fruit than that found in the open boll. A literary revival that seems to have grown past the tentative stage and developed a real form and influence of its own has its foundations resting firmly on Delta ground. It is native, rooted, and yet it is no strange new species but a logical evolution from the earlier literary life of the region, which found its major expression through such writers as William Alexander Percy and Stark Young.

Not all the writers of this Mississippi renaissance are newcomers just beginning to settle themselves into a way of writing and seeking to find a boundary within which to inclose their efforts. The revival is in a sense a revival of interest as much as a revival in production; and established writers like Ben Ames Williams, originally of Macon, turn back to Mississippi for themes and settings (*House Divided* [1947]).

To give an idea of the nature of the Mississippi revival, to indicate from what it stems, and to show wherein it is limited, it might be well to include here some definition of the Delta region itself. Strictly speaking, some ten Mississippi counties are included in the Delta. For the benefit of uninitiated outlanders whose information concerning the geography of the state is less than complete, the Delta referred to here is not the deep delta country that characterizes lower Louisiana and is at its most characteristic from New Orleans to the sea, where the Mississippi River is now actively engaged in moving part of the North American continent out into the Gulf of Mexico. The Delta with which we are concerned "stretches from a point just south of Memphis to a point just north of Vicksburg. It is one hundred and fifty miles long and fifty miles wide. The Mississippi washes its entire western side, and the Yazoo much of its eastern."<sup>2</sup> It is not truly a delta at all but an alluvial plain laid down by the Mississippi throughout the countless years that the river has spread beyond its banks to in-

<sup>\*</sup> Author of *High John the Conqueror*.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Cohn, *Where I Was Born and Raised* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948), p. 22.



undate the land, bringing destruction to it at the same time that new riches were added.

Delta economy, as Cohn says, "rests squarely on cotton," and, because of the deep fertility of the area and the possibility of continuing to farm there in accordance with the traditions of the Old South, the Delta has resisted longer and more thoroughly the changes that have borne down on the South. Where other regions have shifted more in the direction of crop diversification, it has been possible on the broad plantations of the Delta country to keep cotton as king and make the growing of that one cash crop a way of life in itself.

Back about 1925, H. L. Mencken was pointing out the barren spot which the state of Mississippi left in the American literary scene. The state's illiteracy, then highest in the nation and still highest, was, he felt, the cause of its lack of a literature; but the high rate of illiteracy is in direct relation to the tremendous majority of Negro population over whites. It is the Negro population, made up for the most part of farm laborers, which has made possible the continuance of the Delta methods of farming and the way of life of the white landowners, whose customs and traditions form the background for the newly emergent revival literature of the Delta and of Mississippi. There is involved, therefore, some contradiction of Mencken's condemnation of the region as being unable to produce any material fit for print.

But the old order changes, and the plantation system in the Delta region is feeling the impact of powerful forces tending to bring about the establishment of new methods and the development of new techniques of farming and the foundation of new relations among the people whose home is the Delta.

A couple of the changes and stresses affecting Delta life are listed by David Cohn in his Foreword to *Where I Was Born and Raised*, which is, in a sense, a summary of the background of the literary revival that is now taking place in Mississippi.

The changes and fears of the world are reflected, as they must be, in the lives of the people of the Delta. Yet they, subject to the stresses that affect all men, are affected by special stresses. These arise from two factors. The one is that the Delta is largely a cotton economy in a period when cotton, under attack from many sides, is a wobbly economic underpinning for the area. The other is that the Delta is a classical land of Negro settlement at a time when the attitudes of Negroes and whites toward one another are in a state of violent transition. The Negro question, as it exists in the United States, is without counterpart elsewhere. And the same question, as it exists in the Delta, is almost without counterpart in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The coming of mechanization to the plantation and the application of industrial methods to agriculture is at last being felt in the Delta. Such evidences, however, are only signs of the more extensive industrialization that is being felt in all parts of the South and on into the Southwest. The area for conflict is clear, and the clash is loud enough to be heard throughout the whole of the country; for it is out of the conflict between two cultures—the agricultural and the industrial, the essentially rural and the essentially urban—that the literary revival of the Delta country is born.

## II

Let the obvious be said now also, that this renaissance is in most of its aspects a renaissance of literature cut to the regionalistic pattern. The rebirth stems from the Delta, so much a distinct region that its name must be capitalized. The

<sup>3</sup> Cohn, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xi.

writing to be considered here bears all the earmarks of literary regionalism that is defined by Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich in their history and bibliography, *The Little Magazine*:

Regionalism self-consciously strives to portray the all-inclusive reality of a region; it strives to show the lay of the land, the flow of the rivers, the drift of the clouds and the winds; but above all, it labors to reveal the human beings who work and sweat and die on the land, and to reveal how these human beings have built their social institutions, especially their particular colloquial language.<sup>4</sup>

In considering the writers themselves, we shall continue with David Cohn, because we have already gone to him to show some of the forces which are at work in the Delta. *Where I Was Born and Raised* is part and parcel of the literary revival in Mississippi. The first part of the book was published in 1935 as *God Shakes Creation*; the second part was added in 1947 and is a looking-back over the ground covered in the earlier work as well as an evaluation of the new aspects of living which have crept in the interim into Delta living. Cohn has come to the writing of this book with a point of view partly that of a journalist, partly that of a sociologist. He writes with the semidetachment of a man long away from home who has returned to look at the old place and compare it with others in the light of his experience gained in far corners of the earth. Yet his detachment is not entirely objective, nor is it Cohn's intention to be entirely objective. He is a product of the Delta; the regionalistic feeling is too strong; and, though he might come to a study of his people and their surroundings with a little something of the viewpoint of an outsider, he is still one with them.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 129.

A native of Greenville, Cohn properly can be said to be a part of the Delta revival in literature, though not all his books limit themselves to Delta materials. *This Is the Story*, his last title before *Where I Was Born and Raised*, is a record of observations made on a round-the-world journey accomplished in 1944-45 for the Army Service Forces. He has also written *Combustion on Wheels*, *Love in America*, *New Orleans and Its Living Present*, *The Good Old Days*, and *Picking America's Pockets*. In his first book, *God Shakes Creation*, he starts with the Delta, and in his last he returns there, fully aware of the strong upsurge of writing that is developing in the region and aware also of the revival of interest in books among those who do not write. He says:

Among Greenville's recent accessions is what might be called a literary renaissance. In the past it was not given, any more than similar towns, to an excess of book reading, although a respectable number of its older citizens were conversant with letters. . . . Now Greenville not only reads books avidly, but, far worse, it writes them. It has a number of practicing writers disproportionate to the size of its literate population. . . . Apparently there is a thesaurus under every bed in the community; a novel simmering with every housewife's soup.<sup>5</sup>

Not the least substantial of Greenville's claims to fame as the literary capital of Mississippi is the newly established Levee Press. Started by Shelby Foote, a short-story writer, and Ben Wasson, author of a novel called *The Devil Beats His Wife*, the Press intends the publication of finely printed limited editions. Its first volume is a novelette, *Music from Spain*, by Eudora Welty, of Jackson, who may be said to be the chief figure of them all in the Mississippi renaissance. The second book to come from the Levee

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.

Press is to be a volume by William Faulkner.

Greenville has long been one of the centers of the literary life of the state. The city (present population approximately 30,000) was the home of the late William Alexander Percy, whose *Lanterns on the Levee* evokes the nostalgic charm of the Old South. Percy, probably more than any other one man, through his life and activities was responsible for the "general interest and activity in writing, shared by the local citizenry to a large degree" that is noted by Charlotte Capers of the Department of Archives and History at Jackson.<sup>6</sup>

Also of Greenville are Lucile Finlay and Emerson Waldman. Miss Finlay reportedly is at work on a second book which will follow her historical novel, *The Coat I Wore*. Waldman has two novels about the Delta, *The Land Is Large* and *Broad Is the Way*.

It is Hodding Carter, however, who is now perhaps the leading Greenville literary figure. In 1946 he received a Pulitzer journalism award for his editorials in the *Delta Democrat-Times*, the Greenville paper which he started publishing in 1936 after moving away from Louisiana. In Hammond, Louisiana, he had published the *Daily Courier* and used the paper in a fight against the Huey Long regime. But straight journalism has perhaps proved too limited a field for Carter. He is now backing operations of the Levee Press. At least one poem and a short story of his have appeared in *Southwest Review* (Dallas, Texas). His *Lower Mississippi* was published in 1942 as part of the "Rivers of America" series. His first novel, *Winds of Fear*, was published in 1944 while Carter was serving in the Army Intelligence Division. The

story takes the problem of Negro-white relations in the South as its theme. In *Flood Crest*, his second novel, he is dealing with a politician of the Long-Bilbo breed and manages here to bring the white-supremacy doctrine into consideration.

Where Cohn gives in his work a factual presentation of the sharecropper, both Negro and white, and an outline of the means by which he exists, Carter presents the white sharecropper and small landowner as voters and shows the emotions which motivate them.

A result of the economic change beginning in the Delta with the introduction of the sharecropper system is the strong feeling of antagonism that the white farmer has toward the black. Where both races are in open competition for land to work, where labor is the medium and color the only dividing line, white supremacy encounters its greatest threat; and out of this basis of tension come the flare-ups of William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Edward Kimbrough's *Night Fire*, as well as Carter's *Winds of Fear*. With increasing mechanization coming to farming methods and with the resultant lessening in need of large numbers of farm laborers, it can be expected that Delta writers will continue to find stories in racial conflicts which originate in feelings of economic insecurity.

No consideration of any of Mississippi's writing can be made without mention of William Faulkner. Publication of his long-awaited novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, this past autumn, puts him again in the forefront of any southern literary revival. His influence on most of the writers of the state is evident, and particularly does this seem to be true of the Delta region's interpreters. Probably it can be stated without too much error that the writers of Mississippi will have

<sup>6</sup> Letter to the *New York Times Book Review*, November 7, 1948, p. 45.

read one another thoroughly. Where the material is bound within the confines of a limited area, the differences of approach will be of supreme importance in the determination of style and technique.

Faulkner, though not of the Delta, does, from his hill-country home in Oxford, deal with a great many of the problems that are available as story material to the Delta group. Though his stories take their settings from the Mississippi scene, he cannot be classified as a regionalist. The quality of universality that is apparent in his works acts as a force tending to subordinate that which is strictly regional.

Decadence, the breakdown of an older way of living, violence and tension between the races—these are the jumping-off points for Faulkner stories. But in his characters we find not so much people who are exponent types of a region as personifications of various human qualities, usually qualities of evil; for it is concern with the problem of evil that seems to be uppermost with Faulkner. His style is characterized by a removal as far as possible of the author from the story. In particular is this method demonstrated in *The Sound and the Fury*, in which we see the story progressively through the eyes of different individuals. There is in such a style the necessity for omitting or delaying in presenting details pertinent to the actions of the characters.

A certain influence of the Faulkner style seems to show in the work of Eudora Welty, who from her home in Jackson can place a legitimate claim for the top position in the Delta revival. Strictly speaking, Jackson, capital city of the state and another bustling center of literary activity, is not physically a part of the Delta; but Miss Welty's influence already seems to have been felt

throughout the Delta region and the state and shows no signs of limiting itself to that area alone.

Miss Welty handles the Faulkner approach superbly in the title story of her collection, *A Curtain of Green*. Following the accident in which her husband was killed, Mrs. Larkin has withdrawn herself from her neighbors and from the world to the extent that the life in her garden is the only life toward which she puts out any interest. We are shown the scene which touched off Mrs. Larkin's schizoid reaction, but we see the scene through her eyes and get only the details that are important to her. We need not know more.

She would see promptly, as if a curtain had been jerked quite unceremoniously away from a little scene, the front porch of the white house, the shady street in front, and the blue automobile in which her husband approached, driving home from work. It was a summer day, a day from the summer before. In the freedom of gaily turning her head, a motion she was now forced by memory to repeat as she hoed the ground, she could see again the tree that was going to fall. There had been no warning. But there was the enormous tree, the fragrant china-berry tree, suddenly tilting, dark and slow like a cloud, leaning down to her husband. From her place on the front porch she had spoken in a soft voice to him, never so intimate as at that moment, "You can't be hurt." But the tree had fallen, had struck the car exactly so as to crush him to death.<sup>7</sup>

Why did the tree fall? We have no way of knowing with certainty. It is the falling that is important, and in the mind of Mrs. Larkin at this moment there is no room for incidental details.

In "Why I Live at the P.O.," another story from the same collection, Miss Welty has told her story through a character with highly developed paranoid tendencies. We are inclined to agree that

<sup>7</sup> Eudora Welty, *A Curtain of Green* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941), pp. 213-14.



the character is better off living at the post office, completely removed from the bosom of her family; yet we should not forget that throughout the story we have but the one viewpoint; the author has removed herself from the action and what is left is the subtle integration of the "world-against-me" attitude that characterizes the paranoid mind.

Subject matter shows Miss Welty to be looking to the past and the effects which it has produced. These stories, "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "Clytie," "Petrified Man," are not the representation of a busy, bustling society. Instead, they are flooded with a sense of decay; they suggest a system that is falling apart at the seams. In "The Whistle," however, Miss Welty's attention is toward another direction. "The Whistle" is, primarily, the story of an aged couple's efforts to preserve their crop and their land, probably at the expense of their lives. But the crop is tomatoes, not cotton, suggesting here the new economic life introduced by the canning industry. The rows of tomatoes, the plant frames, and the packing sheds are relatively new and give a new background to the course of life in Mississippi.

*Delta Wedding*, her first novel, touches on history, traditions, manners, and customs that still linger in the Delta culture. *The Wide Net* is another collection of short stories, with the title story one that, with a sense of almost mystic communication, seems to tell the mythological quality of everyday life.

In *The Robber Bridegroom*, her novel-ette-fairy story, Miss Welty reflects the regionalist's concern with the folklore of the country; and she weaves into her dreamlike story references to Mike Fink, the keelboat king of Mississippi legend, and to Big Harp and Little Harp, storied robbers of the Natchez Trace area.

Also of Jackson is Cid Ricketts Sumner, who, though born in Mississippi, has lived more than half her life in New York and Massachusetts. She returns to Mississippi, however, for the settings of her novels. Her first, *Quality*, is, in effect, a propaganda work against segregation, since she shows the possibilities of development for the individual Negro where segregation is not a problem. The mob reaction against a Negro who gets above his "place" reflects also the attitude of a white population whose insecurity and fear of social equality with the Negro comes of a distrust of economic equality.

In *Tammy Out of Time*, Mrs. Sumner shows how the strength of innocence protects the pure in heart even amid the complexities and evils of modern civilization. Tammy Tyree is a totally unsophisticated seventeen-year-old girl who is shunted suddenly from her uncomplicated existence aboard a Mississippi River shanty boat to the stresses and strains of life at Brenton Hall, the big house of a plantation which is not on the brink of decay but is already half under. The story may be somewhat overloaded with unconvincing melodrama and with excess sentimentality, but here again the concern is largely with the vanishing of a way of life that is beyond recall and with the possibility of maintaining personal integrity while adapting to the changing circumstances.

The problem of adaptation, shown here in the efforts of the younger generation, is the starting-point for a more affirmative theme of the writers in and about the Delta. If we may inject into *Tammy Out of Time* a certain amount of symbolism perhaps not intended by Mrs. Sumner, we can see Tammy as the direct representation of the society which must shape its ideas and its methods to suit a new economy. The effort to save the



plantation, formerly given over almost entirely to cotton farming, by attempting a tomato crop and by the production of hand-wrought furniture, suggests the closer, more direct dependence of the region on an urban market.

From Carrollton, in the hill country bordering the edge of the Delta, comes Elizabeth Spencer, author of a very good first novel, *Fire in the Morning*. In this novel the conflict arises out of a greed for land, on the one side, and the desire for revenge, on the other. Greed, lust for power, and hate are the prime motivating forces, and over all is again the feeling of the presence of decay, of a somewhat aimless attempt to preserve customs and manners that are no longer significant but are, so to speak, excess baggage in a newer era.

A certain respect for the Negro landowner shown by Miss Spencer in *Fire in the Morning* indicates a field for future development by the Delta writers. A comparative rarity, the Negro who owns his own farm rests uneasily between two attitudes of the surrounding white population—from one class admiration and respect, from another fierce and unadulterated hate.

It is not intended in this essay to give a complete listing of all writers and all titles coming from the Delta country or influenced by the revival of literary activity in the Delta group. There are a great many more Mississippi writers and writers once of Mississippi but now living in other states who logically can be given a place in any accounting of the renaissance there; for the renewal of activity is not confined to the Delta alone; it is more as if the Delta activity were the match setting off activity throughout the remainder of the state.

Charlotte Capers says that in the files of the Department of Archives and His-

tory at Jackson are the names of 295 Mississippi writers who have had material published. Others may now be beginning to write or are on the brink of publication.

Hubert Creekmore, born in Water Valley, Mississippi, and reared at Jackson, is the author of two novels, *Fingers of the Night* and *The Welcome*, and has published poetry and short stories in *Story*, *Poetry*, and *North American Review*. He has published two volumes of verse, *Personal Sun*, and *The Long Reprieve*. He is at present teaching creative writing at the University of Iowa.

James Street, with *O Promised Land*, *In My Father's House*, *The Gauntlet*, and *Tap Roots*, is an exponent of the romantic tradition in Mississippi writing fostered by Stark Young, whose *So Red the Rose* presents the South as it existed before the Civil War. Young, who, like Faulkner, is from Oxford, is far removed from Mississippi in his latest book, *Immortal Shadows*, a collection of the drama criticism in which he has specialized since turning away from the South.

Edward Kimbrough, of Meridian, in eastern Mississippi, has a first novel, *Night Fire*, dealing with mob violence. His second book, *From Hell to Breakfast*, draws its setting and action from a Mississippi political campaign.

Robert Rylee, formerly of Mississippi and now living in Texas, in his *Deep Dark River* gives an appeal for social justice and for a better understanding of the Negro and his problems. Rylee has written a second novel, *The Ring and the Cross*, with its setting the wartime shipbuilding industry on the Texas coast.

James Robert Peery, of Europa, has produced a large amount of pulp-magazine fiction and has two Mississippi novels in his score, *Stark Summer* and *God Rides a Gale*.

Not to be overlooked are Tennessee Williams, originally of Columbus, with his nationally famous plays and his short stories, and David Donald, a native of Goodman and a graduate of Millsaps College, Jackson, whose *Lincoln's Herndon* is a valuable contribution to the work produced by the Lincoln scholars.

Greenwood, a Delta town on the Yazoo River, is the hometown of Mildred Spurrier Topp, whose *Smile, Please*, reminiscences of a Mississippi childhood, was published this past fall. W. T. Person, also of Greenwood, is the author of *Abner Jarvis* and *No Land Is Free* and is reported to be working on another book.<sup>8</sup>

From Kossuth, up in the northeastern hills of the state, comes Thomas Hal Phillips, holder of a Rosenwald Fellowship for Fiction and a Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Award on the strength of his work in progress—now completed under the title *Certain Sons of Men*. Phillips is now on the faculty of the English department of Southern Methodist University at Dallas, Texas, as an instructor in creative writing.

### III

That a literary revival is in progress in the Delta country and the whole of Mississippi is obvious, but among the questions that immediately are suggested are these: What are the causes of the revival? Why the outbreak of new writing?

Partial answers already have been intimated, and the attempt will be made here to sum up the points relating to other answers. Mississippi has long been branded as illiterate. Could it be that

this revival in writing and publishing is, in part, a conscious or unconscious attempt to prove that not all the state is illiterate? Regionalism presupposes a certain amount of local pride, and it seems possible that the Delta revival may come in part from an intense pride in the home country and from a faith in its ability to find a solution to its problems.

The writers, most of them, seem to be of the belief that it is for the South to work out the salvation of the South. Particularly in Cohn does one get the feeling of resentment against northern interference in what is more or less a family matter. The South may be slow, seems to be the feeling; we may be going at things in a confused manner; but we do know what we're up against, and we do know our own people.

In the Delta is the last stronghold of the older, vanishing culture. Here, since the Delta held out longest, is where the conflict of old culture with new forces appears in sharpest definition. Throughout the works of the Delta writers there is the strong emphasis on decay, but decay makes fertile ground; and in an examination of characters who are essentially weak and unable to cope with the complexities of the system with which they are confronted—for such, in particular, are the characters of Eudora Welty and Elizabeth Spencer—might there not be brought to light some of the reasons for their failure?

It follows, then, that the revival in Delta writing proceeds in great degree from an awakening of consciousness of the changes that are shaping themselves and forcing themselves into the life of the region.

<sup>8</sup> Capers' letter.

## The Essence of Shaw's Dramaturgy

WILBUR D. DUNKEL<sup>1</sup>

THE continuing success of Bernard Shaw's plays in the Broadway theaters suggests that underneath the aphoristic fireworks are the methods of the master-craftsman. Although his scintillating wit and iconoclastic ideas have accounted for his reputation, the time may come, as it has for Ibsen's social plays, when the problems discussed will have lost their immediacy and topical significance. Then, if Shaw is as great a dramatist as we believe him to be, there must be universality in his dramaturgy. My purpose, therefore, is to lay open the bare bones of structure in order that we may discover the wit which Shaw applies to dramaturgy as well as to ideas.

That wit with which Mr. Shaw develops his ideas in *Man and Superman* is so dazzling that his ingenuity in plot construction may be unappreciated. Doubtless that is as it should be, for the dramatist's technique ought no more to obtrude than should the arrangement of steel pilasters be apparent in the façade of a stone building. But, as some persons are interested in the strength of a building to withstand the natural shocks of time, so are others curious about the endurance of a play to meet the changing tastes of readers and theatrical audiences. In our time lavish praise is given to the ephemeral, notwithstanding our standards of criticism; indeed, Shaw is praised for the relevancy of his ideas to the present situation.

Writing in the *London Times*, May, 1905, of the production of Shaw's *Man*

and *Superman* at the Court Theatre, Mr. A. B. Walkley observed in comparing Shakespeare and Shaw: "On the one hand a born dramatist, and that the greatest: on the other a man who is no dramatist at all." Mr. Walkley then explains:

All I mean is that when he happens to choose the play as the form in which he shall entertain us there is a certain artistic waste. There is waste because Mr. Shaw neglects, or more probably is impotent to fulfil, what Pater calls the responsibility of the artist to his material. You forgive the waste for the sake of the pleasure. Nevertheless, in the interest of good drama it is one's duty to be dissatisfied. We want a play that shall be a vehicle for the Shavian philosophy and the Shavian talent and, at the same time, a perfect play.

Mr. Walkley, one of the astute critics of the modern drama, missed in Shaw's play the closely knit and artfully manipulated *la pièce bien faite*. But today the French well-made play appears old fashioned to reviewers and critics of the contemporary theater. Objection is made to subservience of characterization to plot. Although Ibsen used the formula of the well-made play in writing his social dramas, *Ghosts*, *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, and *Hedda Gabler*, for example, his characters symbolize ideas in their actions; he avoided subservience to plot while using the twists and turnings of the complications.

Shaw's rebellion against the lack of ideas in the fashionable theaters in London has led to the assumption that he rejected the technique of the French well-made play along with its sterility of

<sup>1</sup> University of Rochester Rochester, N.Y.

thought, for, in plays dominated by the exigencies of contriving an exciting plot, ideas and characterization inevitably become sacrificed.

One must remember that Shaw not only served an apprenticeship as a dramatic critic but also became very good at it, as a rereading of his volumes, *Dramatic Opinions*, will reveal. He was, consequently, in no position after ridiculing Sir Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones for artificial morality in their serious plays as well as for faulty dramaturgy to lay himself open to the scrutiny of his fellow-critics, William Archer, A. B. Walkley, and Clement Scott, with whom he had sharply differed in appraisal of Pinero's craftsmanship. Nor should it be casually assumed that Shaw's early plays were rejected by the West End managers simply because he refused, as Robert Browning had done a generation before, to organize his material for effective production on the stage of a theater. Shaw had learned how to write plays. Though anyone may learn the scientific part of playwriting, dramatic craftsmanship is an exacting art. Shaw chose to write plays; notwithstanding his long prefaces and frequent appendixes to his plays, he sought to rival Shakespeare, an objective to which he has referred throughout his career.

The audience attending Maurice Evans' production of *Man and Superman* doubtless consists of many persons who have not read the elaborate Preface or "The Revolutionist's Handbook" appended to this play. Furthermore, the entire third act, containing Shaw's dramatization of the Life Force in the dream sequence of the Don Juan legend in reverse, is omitted. Yet, with a minimum of ideas, the audience laughs boisterously. Hence to judge Shaw as a playwright, quite apart from the significance of his

ideas, is scarcely to study his plays as in a vacuum. On the contrary, the reader may observe Shaw's skill in the matter of plotting or contriving situations. In particular, there is the difference between what the playgoer sees without analyzing and what the critic finds too obvious to examine.

Mindful of the ideas abounding in Shaw's plays, the reader may disregard the triangle plot as a commonplace of drama or as something with which Shaw did not bother his head but simply had to put up with, since he was writing plays. In *Man and Superman*, however, the grouping of characters into several triangles reveals Shaw's mastery of the complicated business of organizing a large group into several smaller units.

In the beginning, Ann Whitefield's guardians are designated in her father's will. Roebuck Ramsden, the elderly family solicitor, is to serve with Ann's two contemporaries, Jack Tanner and Octavius Robinson. But Ramsden objects to this arrangement because he finds Jack Tanner's economic and political theories unsound and revolutionary. Indeed, Jack Tanner is the author of "The Revolutionist's Handbook," which Shaw includes in the printed play.

Here are three guardians. Another triangle develops around Ann with Jack Tanner and Octavius Robinson as her possible suitors. A third triangle consists of Violet Robinson, Octavius' sister, together with Miss Ramsden, Roebuck's sister, and Ann herself, leading to the disclosure that Violet is about to become an unmarried mother. A fourth triangle develops from Violet's situation. Jack Tanner hales her as his ideal of the modern girl, free from society's false ideas about marriage. Here the triangle consists of Violet, Jack, and the unidentified father. At this juncture, however, Violet



disappoints Jack by announcing that she is secretly married.

During this opening act, when the playwright is confronted with the problem of giving the audience the necessary information to understand the play, Shaw groups and regroups his characters as he introduces each new idea. The manipulation of the large cast to center now on Jack and then on Ann symbolizes the inherent conflict between Jack and Ann—namely, her desire to marry him and his desire to avoid it. In other words, characters do not just appear and talk; each grouping indicates a complication of the theme. However slight this matter may seem to the reader, the playgoer sees these groupings and regroupings. They are the visual adjuncts to the words and phrases which he hears; and this skilful integration of idea and action explains in no small degree the success of a play in the theater. In Wilde's comedies, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which have also been recently revived on Broadway, the entrances and exits appear forced, and, consequently, the groups seem merely a means to the brilliant epigrams and aphorisms. On the contrary, Shaw does not stop in his labor after thinking of repartee and ideas; he continues to motivate the expression of ideas by bringing conflicting characters together.

A further contrast between these two Irish wits as playwrights can be observed in the way their characters appear merely amusing. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* Lord Darlington says, when asked by Lady Windermere why he talks trivially about life: "... Life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it." In *Man and Superman*, on the contrary, Jack Tanner says: "The more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is." But Shaw's paradoxical state-

ment, unlike that of Wilde's, rests securely on the basic idea which he is expounding, namely, respectability is the false pretense of society. Hence Jack Tanner is not trivial, as is Lord Darlington, because Jack is declaring that a man should be ashamed of hypocrisy.

Quite appropriately, Gilbert Murray, the distinguished professor of Greek at Oxford University, dedicated his book on Aristophanes to Shaw with these words: "My old friend G. B. S., Lover of Ideas and Hater of Cruelty; Who has Filled Many Lands with Laughter and whose Courage has Never Failed. . . ." For Shaw's wit, like Aristophanes', is directed against the false standards of society with such skill that the unwary may take his apparent effortlessness as lack of method. That is why Shaw's technique is particularly good; it is not apparent; it does not stand between the reader and the thought or between the audience and the stage action. One scarcely thinks of praising Shaw as a playwright. No wonder that the student may come from his study of Shaw with the impression that he wrote prefaces and dramatic dialogue to expound his witty and socialistic philosophy. Yet it was certainly not by chance that he also wrote plays.

The technical twists which he gives to old situations permit him unlimited variety, incredible as this may seem without examining his treatment of the triangle plot. In *Widowers' Houses* Trench's love of Blanche is complicated by her father's renting tenements. In *The Philanderer* Charteris has two sweethearts, Grace and Julia. In *Candida* Marchbanks, the young poet, fancies himself in love with Candida, the wife of the Rev. James Morell. In *The Devil's Disciple* Judith Anderson, the minister's wife, thinks she is in love with the dashing



Richard Dudgeon, who tries to die for the Rev. Anderson but does so vainly because Judith's husband himself becomes the man of action. In *The Doctor's Dilemma* Mrs. Dubedat, the wife of the tubercular painter, is admired by several physicians and pursued by Sir Colenso Ridgeon to the end. In *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* Lady Cicely has her way with all the men. So does Saint Joan in the play of that name. And, to omit further enumeration, recall Ann Whitefield's winning of Jack Tanner in *Man and Superman*.

These repetitions prompt the question of how Shaw's treatment of the triangle differs from that of other playwrights. In each instance, however, it is the woman who makes the unexpected choice. Her decision seems scarcely at all prepared for, rather unmotivated, in fact, until one pauses to reflect upon it. Yet that choice gives the turn to the plot. While Shaw's men talk *ad infinitum*, expressing ideas on every subject, his women listen. Each woman has her enigmatic smile as unpredictable as that of Mona Lisa.

Shaw thus reveals himself not only an experienced man in the world of women, a true believer in the Life Force, but also a clever technician in plotting; for he takes as his basic premise—"the island in the play" as Barrie calls it—the thesis that women rely not on what is said but on their intuitions!

In these plays, you will recall, the endings are happy. At first glance the endings might be called *deus ex machina* ("god out of the machine"), to bring an arbitrary end to the tangled skein of the play. But it would be a careless critic who would accuse Shaw of ending his plays *deus ex machina*. Mr. Shaw's deprecating smile would lead that critic to re-examine the plays and thus discover that

women's intuition explains all! And that is certainly to apply wit to plotting.

Shaw's method of characterization follows the tradition of comic writers. If not from Shakespeare's work, as Mr. Shaw often avers, at least it derives in part from Ben Jonson's "humour comedy," in which the medieval concept of the four primary elements—heat, cold, moisture, and dryness—became in various blends types of personality. Hence the philosopher's cold reason, the poet's melancholy, the lover's sighs, were attributed to the predominance of blood, phlegm, bile, or black bile in the constitutions of each person. The sanguine person with red face and light hair had, by this reasoning, too much blood and heat. The heat gave him his fiery complexion, while the moisture or blood explained his animated temper. The choleric person was also hot but dry. The phlegmatic was cold and dry. The melancholic was moist and cold. Although our knowledge of physiology has increased considerably since this oversimplification was in vogue, we still may describe persons as choleric, sanguine, melancholic, or phlegmatic, and modern psychiatrists have found these types useful in elementary ways.

In *The Doctor's Dilemma* each of the physicians is quickly typed according to his dominant trait or complexion, much in the manner of Ben Jonson's creating of typical characters in *Every Man in His Humour*. Sir Roger Bonington, for example, is sanguine; Cutler Walpole is choleric; Dr. Blankinsop is phlegmatic; and Sir Colenso Ridgeon is melancholic, as to a lesser degree is Sir Patrick Cullen. Although this procedure can be carried to other plays, to do so is not particularly profitable, since comic dramatists usually satirize dominant types of temperament. In *Man and Superman* Tanner

is melancholic, Robinson phlegmatic, and Ramsden choleric. On the other hand, Straker, the graduate of a polytechnic institute, is sanguine; he reveals skill in mechanics but slight perception of social problems. Notwithstanding these instances, all that matters about the observation is that Shaw follows a well-established tradition in naming his characters and emphasizing predominant humors.

In constructing *Androcles and the Lion*, Shaw develops the basic conflict of drama, namely, the disparity between what a man says and what he does. After writing a spirited defense of Christianity in the Preface and bitterly attacking the church for its failure to give Christianity a trial, he describes this play as a "Christmas Pantomime" for children. Probably Shaw is quite right in reminding present-day adults that they have little faith. But the production given by the American Repertory Theatre last winter revealed that Shaw has remarkable dramatic talent, a sense of effective theatrical situations. When the diminutive Androcles appears on the stage in the Prologue with his huge, blowzy wife, the contrast between Christian humility and modern boldness is unmistakable. The appearance of the lion with the thorn in his paw terrifies both Androcles and his wife. But Androcles symbolizes Christian kindness by extracting the thorn. While in the eyes of his wife—presumably the point of view of the world—Androcles is a nincompoop, he practices his faith and saves his life.

Shaw contrasts, furthermore, faith and expediency in the talk between the Roman Captain and Lavinia, the beautiful Christian prisoner:

CAPTAIN: Are you then going to die for nothing?

LAVINIA: Yes: that is the wonderful thing. It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I have now no doubt at all that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories.

CAPTAIN: But for what?

LAVINIA: I don't know. If it were for anything small enough to know, it would be too small to die for. I think I'm going to die for God. Nothing else is real enough to die for.

That remarkable definition of faith is emphasized by focusing attention on Lavinia. Shaw gives to the Captain a series of short questions to which Lavinia gives reply. And she talks like a human being rather than as a paragon of all the sentimental virtues!

In Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* the characters likewise converse with the common touch of all humanity. The historical lose their awesomeness, cut down to lifelike size. One has only to contrast Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* or John Dryden's *All for Love* with Shaw's play to perceive that prose can stand the test of expressiveness even when the comparison is made with some of Shakespeare's most affecting lines of blank verse or with Dryden's heroic couplets.

Shaw's dialogue, often described as long-winded, or "talky," hardly merits such disparagement if the critic perceives the author's intention of reproducing the effect of actual conversation. Even when Shaw is wittiest, he tries to record the sounds he hears by means of spelling. In an appendix to *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, "English and American Dialects," Shaw observes:

The fact that English is spelt conventionally and not phonetically makes the art of recording speech almost impossible. What is more, it places the modern dramatist, who writes for America as well as England, in a most trying position. Take for example my American captain and my English lady. I have spelt the word conduce, as uttered by the American

captain, as cawndooce, to suggest (very roughly) the American pronunciation to English readers. Then why not spell the same word, when uttered by Lady Cicely, as kerndewce, to suggest the English pronunciation to American readers?

He then adds that his own tongue is neither American English nor English English, but Irish English: "so I am as nearly impartial in the matter as it is in human nature to be." He gives an elaborate key to the cockney English used by Drinkwater. Thus for the purpose of characterization as well as for humor, he records with meticulous accuracy Lady Cicely's proper English, the Scottish accent of Rankin, Drinkwater's cockney dialect, and the sea captain's American pronunciation. However the reader may ponder these spellings on the printed page, the effect upon the audience is immediate. Sharp differentiation of personalities appears in the speech heard by the audience and is immediately integrated with the costumes and manners of the various characters.

Perhaps an easier illustration of the fun which Shaw evokes from the spoken word may be taken from *Caesar and Cleopatra*, in which the names of Cleopatra's nurse becomes comical per se. When she says, "Who pronounces the name of Ftatateeta, the Queen's chief nurse?" Caesar replies, "Nobody can pronounce it, Tota, except yourself."

Shaw's skill in using phonetics achieves effectiveness in *Pygmalion*, where he combines laughter at odd pronunciations with derision of society's false standards. By showing that superficial estimates of character derive from recognition of proper enunciation, he is able to emphasize his favorite theme that the Life Force is basic. The flower-seller who has been trained to speak like a lady wishes

to cultivate herself in order to live in the upper social class to which her enunciation entitles her.

Perhaps the attitude of disregarding Shaw's playwriting stems as much from his own critical pieces as from any other source. His attacks upon the artifice of "Pineroticism" and "Sardoodelism" obscure the fact that he tamed Pineroticism to his own use and submerged it beneath a brilliant barrage of words. But the evolution of the modern drama owes much to Shaw's dramatic talent. "Of My Own Part in the Matter" Shaw writes in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*: "The fashionable theatre prescribed one serious subject: clandestine adultery: the dullest of all subjects for a serious author, whatever it may be for audiences who read the police intelligence and skip the reviews and leading articles." Whereupon Shaw explains his conception of Creative Evolution and his dramatization of the Life Force, the idea which he apparently regards as his principal contribution.

Now that the iconoclast has become an icon, perhaps the most important feature of his dramaturgy is his ability to laugh at himself. In the words of Shakespeare's Falstaff, "I am not only witty in myself but the cause that wit is in other men," the student of Shaw's dramatic method finds the enduring quality in Shaw's plays after more than forty years. Shaw's capacity for laughing at himself, notwithstanding the precision of his method, reminds us of another Shakespearean wit: "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" His wit, in conclusion, pervades every method he has used in writing plays for the theater; wit is indeed the essence of his dramaturgy.

## Freedom for Critics

JOSEPH E. BAKER<sup>1</sup>

AS TOLD by Bertrand Russell, the history of Western philosophy ends in logical analysis. As soon as any movement impinges on ethics or aesthetics, it engages the attention of literary critics: Charles L. Stevenson has offered us, in his *Ethics and Language* (1944), what he describes at the beginning as "a study related to normative (or 'evaluative') ethics in much the same way that conceptual analysis and scientific method are related to the sciences." He tells us that he is not content, like Dewey, to "let ethical methodology end with scientific methodology" (p. 260). And, unlike some logical and linguistic analysts, he is willing to recognize that artistic use of language (emotive, persuasive, nondescriptive) may be needed to "forward the use of rational methods" (pp. 144-45). After dealing gently with Dewey, Mr. Stevenson turns to some "philosophical analysts" who, in the last two decades, "have given increasing attention to emotive meaning":

A. J. Ayer's analysis has provoked heated discussion. Bertrand Russell, whose most recent views on ethical analysis are almost identical with Ayer's, has not, in this connection, been so widely discussed. . . . Rudolph Carnap has devoted several brief pages to the imperative and expressive functions of ethical statements. . . . One can scarcely avoid the inference [in Carnap, who is "particularly unguarded"] that ethical statements, unlike artistic forms of expression, are to be rejected. . . . Yet the present work finds much more to defend in the analyses of Carnap, Ayer, and the others, than it finds to attack. It seeks only to qualify their views—

partly in the light of Dewey's—and to free them from any seeming cynicism.

He absolves the writers mentioned of any "sinister intentions" to "discredit ethics" (the phrase is from W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* [1939], p. 38). They have merely "repudiated all trans-scientific ethical *subject matter*," not ethics. "To compare ethical judgments to imperatives is not to deny that imperatives have an important use. To say that ethical judgments express feelings is not to imply that all feelings are to be inhibited" (pp. 265-67).

Quite true. But this does inhibit the rational critic from condemning Prussian imperatives or the reliance on feeling of German romantics—especially when the two are combined by Nazis. For this would make it just one imperative against another, one feeling trying to inhibit another—with only might to make it "right." And the very heart of Stevenson's book is his agreement with this passage, which he quotes here from Bertrand Russell's *Religion and Science* (1935): Ethics

is an attempt to bring the collective desires of a group to bear upon individuals; or, conversely, it is an attempt by an individual to cause his desires to become those of his group. . . . When a man says, "This is good in itself," . . . he means . . . "Would that everybody desired this!"

Or, as Stevenson puts it in his "First Pattern of Analysis": "'This is good' is synonymous with 'I approve of this; do so as well'" (p. 81). But, surely, if an

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honest man knew he meant this, he would say it. Gain acceptance among intellectuals for such a "synonym" and you have effectively blocked ethical criticism.

Speaking of I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), Stevenson says, "Although Richards was primarily concerned with aesthetics, his theory of value is quite general, and relevant to evaluation in ethics. . . ." Stevenson disagrees with part of Richards' analysis (pp. 8-9), but adds in a note that in *The Meaning of Meaning*, by Ogden and Richards (1923), there is a suggestive passage "quoted at the beginning of the present volume." This book and his own initial quotation from it are mentioned again by Stevenson in his summary of the work of Russell, Ayer, Carnap, *et al.*, to which I have already referred. And, indeed, anyone coming upon this passage in *The Meaning of Meaning* must be struck by its crucial importance. It concerns

words which have been erroneously regarded without question as symbolic in function. The word "good" may be taken as an example. It seems probable that this word is essentially a collection of homonyms, such that the set of things, roughly, those in connection with which we heard it pronounced in early years (a good bed, a good kick, a good baby, a good God) have no common characteristic.<sup>3</sup>

If this were true, Basic English would be an impossibility at best, and at worst a fraud. The experience of Basic English refutes this and several other theories set forth in *The Meaning of Meaning*. To continue:

But another use of the word is often asserted to occur, of which some at least of those which we have cited are supposed to be degenerations, where "good" is alleged to stand for a unique, unanalysable concept. This concept, it is said, is the subject-matter of Ethics [a footnote cites

<sup>3</sup> (5th ed., 1938), p. 125. I begin this quotation a few sentences before Stevenson does.

Moore's *Principia Ethica*]. This peculiar ethical use of "good" is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we so use it in the sentence, "*This is good*," we merely refer to *this*, and the addition of "is good" makes no difference whatever to our reference. When, on the other hand, we say "*This is red*," the addition of "is red" to "this" does symbolize an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But "is good" has no comparable symbolic function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to *this*, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another.

Why not say there is "no common characteristic" in things of such different color as red hair, red-white-and-blue, red barn, red sunset? Surely, the person who says, "*This is good*," means to extend reference to some other good thing! Here is where Semanticists differ so markedly from those materialists who, even in denying the existence of supernatural beings, are willing to admit that by the cross a Christian means to symbolize something. Quite arbitrarily, *The Meaning of Meaning* lays it down, as the fourth of the "Canons of Symbolism," that "a symbol refers to *what it actually is used to refer to*, not necessarily to *what it ought in good usage, or is intended by an interpreter, or is intended by the user to refer to*" (p. 103). In the Summary, we are told, "The observance of these Canons ensures a clear prose style, though not necessarily one intelligible to men of letters" (p. 246).

Apparently, men of letters have taken this lying down, or, perhaps, they have gone on about their creative business, ignoring the challenge as something beneath their consideration. But I. A. Richards has had great influence; his theories deserve serious examination. The portion I have italicized in the above Canon—what does it signify clearly and intelli-



gibly? Does it mean that, in setting forth what Coleridge has to say about the Imagination (as Richards does in another book), we ought to revise Coleridge's meaning wherever he mistakenly refers to a metaphysical entity that doesn't really exist in Richards' philosophy? Must Coleridge's words mean what they would mean if they were used by I. A. Richards? Semantic methods are offered to us to clarify discourse; do they always justify the advertisement they have received? I do not intend to answer these questions but merely to ask them, speaking as a man of letters who sees the freedom of the critic under attack from that quarter. It has not taken the followers of Semantics long to make the obvious application to criticism—and to many other intellectual pursuits—invited by the following principle expressed in *The Meaning of Meaning*:

It might be supposed that it is rather certain subjects which do not merit attention, but closer scrutiny suggests that these subjects, of which Theology appears to be a good example, are themselves merely word systems. But even the most barren fields have their psychological interest, and those who approach a discussion armed with a symbolic technique and able to apply such principles as the Canons dealt with in the last chapter may hope every day in every way to find themselves better and better [p. 132].

Hence the difficulty of arguing with a Semanticist. Words cease to refer to what the user intended them to refer to. Not content, like the old-fashioned positivist, to say that a theologian is clearly mistaken and is speaking of entities that have no reality, the Semanticist pronounces that theology makes no reference and is "merely" a word system. If a "theologian" wished to proceed against these philosophers as severely as they proceed against him, his "scrutiny" might "suggest" that in their hearts they really

know "good and evil" as clearly as they know red and orange, but prefer to adhere to a "word system" which requires that they deny, theoretically, that this can be true, for that would be dualism, and to their faith, dualism is the devil. Hence, for the sake of their faith, they must do violence to their rationality. The chief obstacle to the total triumph of their materialism or positivism over human thought has been that some witness keeps speaking up and saying, "Yes, you analyze cleverly, but I am *conscious* of right and wrong, of the validity of many a moral and aesthetic principle."

The strategy of Semantics is to discredit the witness or to confuse the jury regarding the *meaning* of the witness' evidence. All the testimony is accepted verbatim. And, then, we are told that its words are symbols that do not refer to what they were "intended by the user to refer to." To be specific, we are told by Mr. Stevenson that when we said, "This is good," the meaning of our statement was not what we thought. It was "synonymous with 'I approve of this,' " or, in the words of Ogden and Richards, "it serves only as an emotive sign."

In 1944, Professor Stevenson not only annexed the province of "ethics" to that of "language" in the book I have referred to, but, in the *Journal of Philosophy*, he also applauded an invasion of aesthetics launched in Bernard C. Heyl's *New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism*.<sup>3</sup> Heyl's book is still to be reckoned with. It is enlightened and moderate, but it is representative, nevertheless, and it throws down the gauntlet. I think it should not go unchallenged.

If the validity of value judgments is denied, then criticism as such ceases to exist, even if we are willing to transfer the term itself to some other form of

<sup>3</sup> New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943.

scholarship or essay writing. But, less drastic analysis, reforming criticism rather than liquidating it, must be welcome. In so far as semantic scrutiny contributes to the improvement of rational thinking, it is of the very essence of criticism. I do not wish to leave the impression that I deplore the astringent comments made by Semanticists at the expense of vague and loose language. Often, like their eighteenth-century predecessors (Hume is their special hero), they delight us with their clarity, even when they are clearly wrong. But, for the sake of having a healthy culture in the twentieth century, we must not leave them unanswered if they are clearly wrong. *New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism* is intelligent, but its author is more intelligent, for by the end of its 155 pages, Mr. Heyl has progressed beyond some mistaken conceptions with which the book begins. But he does not seem to be aware of his advance.

He says in the Preface, "During the past several years, meaning and evaluation have been my leading interests," and, by "meaning," he refers to "linguistic" questions. His subtitle is *A Study in Semantics and Evaluation*. The first section begins:

The first part of this book aims to show in what ways and to what degree linguistic confusion is responsible for the inadequacy of contemporary art criticism and esthetics. To accomplish this, it will first be necessary to explain, as briefly and simply as possible, the nature of verbal problems, the kind of confusion which may be caused from a misunderstanding of them, and the correct solutions of these difficulties.

The rest of the first half of the book illustrates these "problems, confusions, and solutions," by showing the different meanings ascribed to "art," "beauty," and "truth." Heyl is not a semantic fanatic; he wisely rules out any attempt

to "explain away" disagreements as merely verbal. What follows is an intelligent and will-informed study. He thinks that "prevalent confusions can be avoided by recognizing the inevitability of divergent definitions and statements, by interpreting these correctly, and by defining one's own position with care" (p. 26). He opposes particularly "Real definitions," i.e., those which

attempt to state something "significant" or "true" about their referents; but semantics teaches one to question deeply this alleged significance or truth because it is expressed, as we have seen, in highly ambiguous terminology. . . . Because the majority of estheticians, that is to say, incorrectly believe they can tell us what art or beauty is and attempt to do so, the essential claims of each writer are invalidated by the contradictory claims of another [p. 37].

But the book does not stop at this point; it moves further toward critical standards than Stevenson's parallel book, *Ethics and Language*. The second half of Heyl's book is concerned

solely with judicial criticism, which tries to answer the questions: what is good or bad, better or worse? and what is a great work of art? [He admits that the problem] of the correct theoretical foundation for value judgments is not primarily semantic, but ontological. Granted, that is to say, that much of the current confusion in writings upon art comes from linguistic mistakes of different sorts, nonetheless verbal predicaments should not obscure the reality of the problem [pp. 91-92].

In this section of the book, he takes up three types of criticism. "Subjectivism," however, receives direct attention for only four pages. "Objectivism," he argues, is "inadmissible and perhaps harmful, and only relativism will give sensible and significant meaning to value judgments." At this point, he finds himself "agreeing with John Dewey that" we can have "standards and rules" and "criteria" without expecting them to be

"eternal and immutable" (pp. 92, 96). "Relativism" is what the Schlegels preached in saying, for example, that we cannot apply the same principles in judging Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. But Mr. Heyl has not abandoned his own criteria.

The attack on "objectivism" seems to prove too much. For, when he sets forth his own view under the name of "relativism," we find him—like most of the critics he criticizes—making assumptions which have a theoretical basis of the type he has condemned. He believes that "there exist a number of better kinds of people," though "no one can justifiably claim superiority for any single psychological type" (p. 132). But, in claiming superiority for several psychological kinds, he has surely made exactly the same assumption of standards which he has said cannot be justified. When Mr. Heyl says, "There exist a number of conflicting yet genuinely superior artistic principles," surely this must imply a standard by which they are known to be superior. Thus, he misses the point when he asks, "Should the critic then attempt to show that either the Chinese standards or our own are correct, valid, or true ones? . . . The relativist will understand the futility and impertinence of pronouncing categorical judgment upon two such divergent and sensitive artistic approaches" (pp. 135-37). But why not ask how he knows that Chinese art is sensitive or that sensitiveness has merit? And, in defending the insight which is in him, he would be forced to defend what the "objectivist" is really talking about. Is sensitiveness Western or is it Chinese? Or is it something more absolute, according to which, perhaps, the two cultures themselves might be compared? Should we accept Assyrian standards, also, as correct and valid, or treat Assyrian art as

inferior to that of China because it is less sensitive? To say that both Western and Chinese masterpieces are sensitive and beautiful is no more relativist, no more "semantic," than to say that two different Western paintings are sensitive. In either case, an objective standard is implied.

The Semanticist's weapon (for it is often used as a weapon rather than as a scientific instrument) can usually be turned against those who are most eager to wield it. "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." We do not say this to discourage self-defense against aggression. And vigorous Semantic attacks tempt us to add, concerning certain theories: "They that take the word shall perish with the word." Mr. Heyl is not one of the worst sinners in this respect, but he is capable of begging the question thus:

When the experiences and appraisals of *judicious* critics diverge, why conclude that one or the other is wrong rather than that each is accurately describing his own experience and that the *valuable* experiences of *equally* sensitive individuals necessarily differ in fundamental ways? [p. 138] [italics added].

By deciding that both are judicious and their experiences valuable, he has already decided that they are not wrong. After being so critical in selecting our critics, must we at that point abandon our independence and accept on faith, uncritically, whatever judgments they propose? Actually, he does not accept the opinion of any critic in any case where he disagrees; e.g., he mentions Tolstoy's "correct method of approach" and, three pages later, says, "Tolstoy's verdict seems warped." Moreover, to declare two degrees of sensitivity equal, one needs a fairly precise, "objective" measuring-rod. It would be easy to show that, back of this author's many sound judgments, are certain Real Definitions of the sort he

has condemned. We could formulate one of them: "A judicious critic is (or ought to be) sensitive." Writers are being praised or condemned in a tone implying that something significant is being said about values, not merely that Mr. Heyl is telling us something about his own use of language.

Semantics and relativism cannot allow the "Platonic absolutism" implicit in Mr. Heyl's judgments and criteria. Reviewing this book in the *Journal of Philosophy*, in 1944, C. L. Stevenson wishes that "the study of semantics, emphasized in the first part of the volume, [had] been more systematically extended to the second part." But I would rather say that the book grows in wisdom as it progresses. It is to the author's credit that he did not carry his nihilistic analysis through to the bitter end, for the end of such verbal annihilation is a very illogical negativism, even when it calls itself logical positivism. If Mr. Stevenson, after his linguistic analysis of ethical statements, had gone as far as Mr. Heyl in the attempt to make valid normative judgments and to evaluate the work of other critics, he, too, might have had a similar experience. Indeed, Stevenson admits on the last page of his book, "The most significant moral issues, then, begin at the point where our study must end." When the critic begins to evaluate, he must recognize, willy-nilly, certain "truths" which he scolded the "absolutists" for trying to formulate. The dilemma is illustrated in Heyl's book where he is engaged in rejecting certain experts:

But if the competent critic should apply the principle of psychological relativism when judging all *superior* standards, he may pronounce *definitive* judgment upon those *inferior* ones which depend upon crude and untrained experience, hasty intuitions, and cultural ignorance. For irreducible relativity emphatically does *not* imply that one criterion is as good as the next. . . . To cite a specific case, some of the

standards and evaluations so arrogantly presented by Mr. Thomas Craven in his volume, *Modern Art*, are inferior ones . . . [p. 143].

These led Craven to deplorable "wholesale condemnations of such distinguished painters as Matisse and Picasso." But how, then, can Mr. Heyl rule out the possibility that a critic still more "intelligent, subtle, sensitive," might condemn, as "inferior" and "arrogantly presented," the attacks on Shakespeare by Tolstoy, by T. S. Eliot, by John Crowe Ransom? Yet, he speaks with respect of all three of these. His own "sensitive critics" are quite capable of "wholesale condemnations." He is an absolutist as far as he goes—in condemning Craven—but beyond his own range he merely gives up and accepts T. S. Eliot. He has a yardstick, but it is not fit for precise work; only the inches are marked. Nevertheless, we should not condemn his use of a yardstick. How could he evaluate without some implied "Platonism"?

In short, he found it impossible to use this new "scientific instrument" when he got down to business. He has tried. The experiment was worth performing. And its failure is all the more impressive because Mr. Heyl does not set out to argue that the experiment has proved such techniques failures. He does not even note that this is what has happened.

He has misled himself in beginning this second part of the book with a false definition:

Objectivism or absolutism typically holds that a definite amount of value resides intrinsically in the object in the sense that the value has ontological subsistence and is independent of any human relationship. It follows that the objectivist critic will believe in the existence of absolute, ultimate standards which lie outside or above human evaluations. . . .

But are all absolutists actually such inhumanists? He offers insufficient evidence to show that this is what any large



group of critics mean, and he refers to many passages that would cast doubt on it. Perhaps all that we can conclude is that principles show to best advantage when embodied in concrete judgments, not when formulated in abstractions. But the same can be said of his own "relativism." Setting up a straw man labeled "objectivist" and knocking it down, he finds himself groping in the dark when he needs to hold on to something. He grasps the right criteria or

some of them, but he does not recognize them for the very "absolutes" whose existence he has denied.

In short, Mr. Heyl offers us "new bearings" in criticism. But, when he finds his bearings, they are not new. And what we seek in thinking is the truth, new or old. There is no merit in mere novelty, as such. Perhaps semantic analysts have built up an apparent conflict between themselves and the "absolutists" which is only semantic.

## *Toward Achieving the Objectives of Freshman Composition<sup>1</sup>*

GEORGE S. WYKOFF<sup>2</sup>

WHATEVER the immediate objectives of freshman composition, their successful achievement both primarily and in the last analysis depends upon the milieu or climate or environment in which the composition teacher works. It is this general theme that I wish briefly to develop. At present, far too many college English department members have little, if any, interest in the course; others who might once have had or might have developed an interest have lost it because of undesirable teaching conditions; and still others, with a more than average interest, are faced with an almost impossible task: too many students, too heavy a teaching load, too little tangible reward. I well realize that every detail of what I have to say has been said by someone, somewhere. But if this phase of the subject is important, repetition here is assuredly no sin.

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English held at Chicago, November 25-27, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> In charge of English I (Freshman Composition), at Purdue University.

Looking toward not a complete solution of all the difficulties but at least some partial alleviation, I believe that we should begin or continue or emphasize a process of education of ourselves, of our colleagues in composition, of our high-school people, of our colleagues in literature, of our heads of departments, deans, and other administrators, and, oh, yes, even of the students themselves.

For ourselves, that is, those who, modestly be it said, do have an interest in freshman composition and who would like to make progress toward what a good composition teacher should be:

1. We can aim at a better understanding of the field, with our eventual goal scholarship in composition comparable to scholarship in any literature field. Aside from an increasing amount of production in linguistics, semantics, general educational theory, and the like, there is an increasing number of books and national and regional periodicals with which the teacher of composition should be familiar. Among the latter, I have



specifically in mind *College English*, the *English Journal*, the *CEA Critic*, and some of the state or regional publications, like those from New England, North Carolina, Illinois, Kansas, and Michigan.<sup>3</sup> I have a feeling that only a small percentage of composition teachers have a reading acquaintance with such materials. Since possession is more likely to lead to reading and re-consultation, a very small part of our personal annual budget spent for such books and periodicals is a most wise professional investment. Also a better understanding of our work can be attained by planning and attending regional, state, or interstate conferences on freshman English, such as were held at Syracuse University in 1946 and 1947. Those of us who were privileged to attend the Conference on Communications here in Chicago almost two years ago recall the interest, the enthusiasm, and the value of such a meeting.

2. We might adopt a more scientific attitude toward the details of our work and apply, in addition to our objective tests, much more of the experimental method, either formally or informally. As in this paper, we are inclined to use far too often, "I think," "I believe," "we feel," "we have found," in many of our procedures which may or may not result in similar conclusions if reliable scientific methods were used. As a consequence, we should do or continue to do "research" in our field, the content being the various more direct proposals for the improvement of freshman composition. A little thought will suggest a fairly imposing list of problems which need investigation. Our experiments may be compre-

hensive, or they may be only simple "pilot-plant" experiments, but they should use scientific or experimental-control methods. In addition to the conventional areas as well as new areas opening up—like audiovisual aids, for example—we might also well repeat for verification the experiments that others have made, until the mass of information is sufficient to justify indisputable conclusions, upon which recommendations for action can be based. Such scientific procedure will approach Francis Bacon's ideal of the usefulness of the inductive method and will perhaps contribute results which will be of greater value than those from any other area of English research.

3. As a consequence, composition teachers should write. This writing should include accounts of research and experiments mentioned above, and it should include accounts of courses and interesting procedures being tried. It is a truism that we can improve our own programs by knowing what is being tried and accomplished in other places.

4. Finally, for ourselves, there should be included among us, both as individuals and as groups, "pioneers." The most notable example at present is the groups who are charting the way in the courses in communication; and, although many of us, with neither pride nor humility, belong to that group described by Pope,

Be not the first by whom the new is tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside,

we are looking forward, in regard to these courses, with eager interest to the estimates and results that are beginning to come.

Now about "educating" our colleagues in composition. In addition to the foregoing:

5. If we believe in the usefulness and value of freshman composition, we

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the *English Leaflet* (New England), *North Carolina English Teacher*, *Illinois English Bulletin*, *Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English*, and the *English Bulletin* (Michigan).

should seek ways of changing the attitude which we find expressed time and again as follows: "At present, most if not all English instructors consider service courses as impositions to be escaped" (J. L. Vaughan and E. C. McClintock, *CEA News Letter*, October, 1946). Of such colleagues, some are graduate assistants hoping that the Ph.D. will help them to escape. Some are young Ph.D.'s who are reading themes while they make a reputation in literary scholarship. Some are literature specialists who occasionally draw a section or two of composition. Whoever they are and however long they have freshman composition to teach, they should be persuaded to realize that this course is worth as much time, effort, and energy as any course in literature. They should also realize that there can be considerable monotony in the work; but, by the very variety of the methods followed to achieve objectives and by ingenuity on the part of the instructor, this monotony is not nearly so terrifying as some critics have asserted.

6. Also, we might "educate" these composition colleagues in sharing the sympathetic understanding which we here, I hope, have of the problems of the high-school English teachers, with their six varied classes a day containing 150 to 220 students, with study-hall supervision, and an ungodly number of extra-curricular activities to supervise. Little wonder that our freshmen tell us they wrote few themes in high school. I have a feeling which I hope is wrong that in any fair- or large-sized college English department, only two or three at most have any genuine concern or interest in such high-school problems and that the others are content with damning the poor preparation of their students. Perhaps we might get better students if we put our condemnations into strong lan-

guage and sent them with our reasons to high-school superintendents, school boards, parent-teachers' associations, and others who are in a position to implement improvements.

Concerning the "education" of teachers of literature, by whom I mean those "teachers of literature" who are completely intolerant of composition. For them we can stress two proposals:

7. When they do teach an occasional course in composition, they should give it their best effort, and they should expect no especial accolade. There is an unverified rumor that certain professors of literature are expecting the Congressional Medal of Honor for having, during the war, condescended to descend from the heights to mingle with a group of graduate assistants and young instructors in "taking over" a section or two of "Freshman Comp." From a large mid-western university comes the statement: "My experience convinces me that, at least in large collegiate departments, objectives are best attained when the work is shared democratically by all ranks. The problem loses much of its mystery when the full and associate professors in a staff, as a matter of course, take a section of freshmen once a year or oftener" (Merritt Y. Hughes, "Some Prophecies of Our Doom," *English Journal*, college ed., XXVII [1938], 331).

8. Literature teachers of an intolerant type might also be persuaded to cease disparaging the life, the work, and the achievements of teachers of composition. Some seem to take a fiendish delight in ridiculing and discouraging those about to enter or already in the field. For a time it seemed as if the attitude were changing, but within the past year there have been statements like the following: "According to a professor of literature I know, any man who will submit to a

composition assignment for more than two years is worthy of nothing but contempt" (Henry W. Sams, *CEA News Letter*, March, 1948). There is an irony about such criticism. About fifteen years ago a nationally known teacher of literature, who was in a position to know, admitted that composition courses were used to subsidize courses in literature; in other words, to put it baldly, money appropriated by administrators for the teaching of composition was sparsely spent for the purpose and the remainder misappropriated so that Professors X and Y could give their favorite specialized courses to six or eight students.

And now for a step into dangerous territory, when I speak of educating heads of departments, deans, and other administrators:

9. We can try, where composition and literature are under one head, to persuade such a head to have at least a sympathetic attitude toward the former. The best department head I know has insisted for years that he have each year a section of freshman composition in order that he might know what its difficulties are and what suggestions he can make for its improvement. There is need, too, for educating heads of departments in the matter of giving professional advancement, in salary and rank, to successful teachers of composition on the same basis that it is given to teachers of literature. Already, there is precedent for such procedure in some institutions. May it become more general!

10. We can try to "educate" the administration through sympathetic department heads—otherwise, directly—in the matter of more reasonable teaching loads and a smaller number of students per class. From experience-exchanges with composition colleagues in my own university and elsewhere, I am com-

pletely convinced that nothing will kill interest in a teacher faster or cause him, of necessity, to do shoddy teaching or make him more eagerly desire to escape from this phase of English than oversized and/or too many composition classes. There are numerous attendant evils: the very hopelessness of doing the task well is one of the most discouraging concomitants. About more reasonable teaching loads and a more reasonable number of composition students, there have already been numerous resolutions, without much result, and we ought to try to get some scientific evidence. Precisely how many composition students can a teacher teach effectively? Precisely how many themes a week can he read efficiently—if he follows some of the proposals made for effective reading: for purpose, subject material, arrangement, expression, mechanics, and if, in addition, he makes some of the detailed comments on each theme that are supposed to be of practical help to the student. Greatly needed in such matters are what the engineers call "time and motion studies," and greatly needed, too, is not a survey of department heads concerning teaching loads and size of classes (there have been a number of these already) but a survey of actual teachers of composition to find how many classes and how many students they believe, sincerely, they can handle and still do their work adequately and with a sense of conscientious achievement. Such evidence, rather than requests and resolutions, might receive a better hearing and perhaps lead to action—even though, as now, budgets all along the line are stretching toward the breaking-point. Until action is taken in this most important matter, no administrator or other critic has any just reason for blaming the composition teacher for the composition weaknesses of our students. It is there-

fore a pleasure to read occasionally a communication like the following from a department head: "In spite of constant quarreling with the dean, we are keeping our composition load down to twenty students per class."

II. And now for the final group, the students. From many quarters we do hear the charge that freshman composition is a failure and that our college graduates are illiterate. How scientific are these charges? Upon what statistics are they based? What tests have been given, what objective surveys made, what figures compiled to establish the conclusions? I suspect that many of these charges are gatherings of individual opinions based on hasty generalization, of little more worth than some of the extravagant conclusions found in the advertising pages. If such charges are merely compilations of opinions, it is also a pleasure to record here the statement of a tough-minded industrialist, Mr. K. B. MacEachron, Jr., of General Electric Company: "The college graduates of today are much more literate than their predecessors and the beneficial effect in industry has been great" (*CEA News Letter*, March, 1946).

Let us grant that, of our freshmen, an *X* percentage work just hard enough to pass the course; grant also that an *X* percentage of those even above minimum passing will gladly forget what they learned after a period varying from two weeks to three years. Can we fail these students on that expectation? Or should we have special grade-recording cards in

freshman English bearing for such students the warning: "This product is guaranteed to speak and write adequately for a period of ninety days. Any defect appearing in the product after that date is not the responsibility of the teacher." Whether the training in writing is obtained in the traditional freshman composition course or in the courses in communication, the problem of retention will remain. Apparently much good is being done for the cause by follow-up work in the post-freshman composition years by the use of all-university committees on standards in English like those at Purdue and Illinois and perhaps about three-score other institutions—committees which check constantly on each student's proficiency in written English and, where there is regression, can require remedial work and even prevent graduation of unregenerate candidates.

Oversized classes, heavy teaching loads, unsympathetic colleagues, a too large percentage of indifferent students! Whatever our objectives: Do we fail too badly? Do we succeed moderately well?

Whenever I read or hear statements about the so-called "failure" of freshman composition, I am invariably reminded of a statement by Dr. Samuel Johnson: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." Freshman composition may not be done too well; but, all things considered, we are agreeably surprised to find it done as well as it is.



## The Basic Communications Course Reconsidered

FREDERICK SORENSEN<sup>1</sup>

THREE years ago, while living in the rarefied atmosphere of Colorado, I described for *College English*<sup>2</sup> an attempt being made at the University of Denver to fit English I more usefully into the modern world. My admittedly idealistic description was rewarded by a sarcastic blast from a Mr. Samuel Middlebrook of New York City.<sup>3</sup> I feel sure that it will be of interest to persons who may have followed the former exchange to have the subsequent history and opinion of one of the participants, now come from the well-advertised experiment one mile high to the low and needy soil of Alabama.

I agree with the gentleman from New York that something is rotten in English I as traditionally taught, and I share with him an abhorrence for themes. But I have a still stronger abhorrence for any thoughtless contempt of experiments. Belittling sarcasm is easy to produce and has been used before to cover a barrenness of ideas. It is considerably more simple to remain with old ways of doing things, while cleverly inveighing against them, than to face the immense and complicated task of finding ways to alter what is admittedly poor. I have good reason to believe that my own sad history in actually trying to do something to change the sterile teaching of Fresh-

man English has been like the histories of many others similarly engaged in recent years. I feel sure that some of the disappointments and discouragements of experimenters in general are caused by people who throw verbal brickbats around instead of working to contribute helpful suggestions. There are persons who only bewail or make wisecracks; and there are others who bestir themselves, even to the extent—in our profession—of jeopardizing their positions as proper Ph.D.'s in Elizabethan literature, or eighteenth century, or what-not. As long as most of us, however "PhDeified" we are by reputable institutions, have to begin our teaching careers with Freshman English, it would stand us in good stead to do what we can to improve the teaching of that subject. If certain new directions come to seem aimless to us—as the early Michigan State program seemed to me and later the program at the University of Denver—it is hardly to be wondered at. New things are entitled to trials and errors. They are also entitled to a fair hearing and to an objective treatment from the clever men who stay safely in ivied towers and scan the horizon for upstarts with strange ideas.

If Mr. Middlebrook cared to move about in the real world a little, he might now find a most respectable body of opinion in favor of an integrated science of man which will include every field of study, including the study of language.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "The Basic Communications Course," *College English*, VIII (November, 1946), 83-86.

<sup>3</sup> "English in Cellophane," *College English*, IX (December, 1947), 140-43.

<sup>4</sup> See Lancelot Law Whyte, "Scientific Thought in the Coming Decades," *Harper's*, November, 1948, pp. 44-48.



We are not to look at the discoveries of physics alone, now, but other ways, all ways, for a clarification of thought. It is not new to say that there is a vast confusion of thinking, and it is not new that confused thinking does not make good writing—or help reading or listening either. It is not a new idea to try to find subjects for practice writing which students find interesting and even feel are worth while. Trying to make a thorough relationship between language—reading it and writing it and listening to it and speaking it aloud—and the process of life itself, trying to provide a new point of view from which students may really work with spontaneous interest, is not altogether new either. But it has not yet been done satisfactorily on a large scale. Experiments are still going on, in major and minor ways and places, and will be heard from in spite of potshots from the towers that make the going harder than it ought to be.

Perhaps it seems unreasonable at first thought that English I has anything to do with science, with the body-mind dualism which Mr. Whyte says must be overcome throughout society, but it is well to remember the fresh young moderns we are dealing with. If what I have found in my students is not found in more sophisticated students of New York, or in the literary-minded few elsewhere, they will of course ignore the new efforts toward integration and remain satisfied with the old ways—though Mr. Middlebrook suggests that they are not really satisfied. The general problem has been put to me simply and clearly in the puzzled questions of students—especially GI's—who can handle complicated machinery and mathematics but find themselves helpless before the abstractions in the English department. "If a fellow could only get the breakdown,"

one man said. "If I could see how it works, I could get it."

As I see it, the first job of English I is that of relating language to life and teaching the language processes as a part of life, pointing out the necessity for language in every field so that English I becomes in the mind of every student the important study it actually is. I did not need Mr. Middlebrook to inform me that the idealism at the University of Denver was a move in the wrong direction, even if there had not suddenly been too many students and too little space to make any attempt at individual instruction feasible. For the record, I came into the program when it was well under way, with its direction set. I found the going impossible for reasons which Mr. Middlebrook wisely surmised, the same reasons which have caused Denver to blow up in various directions and leave Michigan State the undisputed master of the Communications field. Lack of co-operation from the counseling service whose business it was to protect the psychological integrity of D.U. students was a good thing; informed people could not possibly permit uninformed "clinicians" to tamper with student lives, and, as it turned out, there was no program for training clinicians even in the methods of teaching grammar and rhetoric, let alone in how to analyze students. The "Writing Clinic" was a tragic semantic blunder on the part of somebody who figured that if there was a Speech Clinic and a Reading Clinic, there should be a Writing Clinic too. One can only say after such a bitter experience as mine at Denver that the whole personalized plan came to stink in the nostrils so much worse than the stench which Mr. Middlebrook ascribes to traditional themes that one returns to sensibility with gladness.

But the basic idea of relating language

to life is sound. I have found that students invariably respond when they are convinced that English I can be a tool toward more intelligent living and understanding, that it can contribute to success in any field of endeavor. Making clear the puzzling business of why one talks one way in public, another at home, and why a student must learn grammar which is useless for most practical purposes—these things are simply part of the fresh and liberating feeling which should, in my opinion, be sought for in English I. This idea also is coming to have behind it a respectable body of opinion and research.

The order I have finally come to have in my own teaching, after working with two of the most ambitious experiments in the country, is very simple. First, I conduct a kind of Cook's tour of the extensive provinces of knowledge in search of meaningful and suggestive questions and human problems. This stage of my class is always puzzling to some who have had their Aristotle and Cicero straight, without the dilution of modernity; but I have yet to see it fail to be stimulating. It comes, of course, from my studies in semantics. Second (and the stages are not precise but growing gradually and changing) comes the elementalistic breakdown, the logical analysis of problems, a process commonly confused with thinking. It is deductive in nature and pedestrian and careful rather than wild-eyed with the joy of making. Third, there is the stage of synthesis and a resolute planning of a course of action designed to go step by step from the simple elements to the complex whole again, from mere saying to being and doing.

I remember an early surmise I had that Communications was being taken over by Speech men for their own purposes. National Speech meetings began

paying more attention to Communications than English meetings did. The heads of the biggest Communications courses were all Speech men. I see now some of the reasons why I could never agree with them. Even though I honestly tried to use some of the methods which Speech heads suggested in both of the programs I was associated with, there was something about it which seemed to me as phony as Dale Carnegie. Just as friendship could never mean to me merely a relationship to use for my own advancement, writing and speaking and reading and listening were something far more than means to get on in the practical world. They had to be means toward understanding. I was not satisfied with "The Word" (whatever Word) delivered persuasively and neatly on three fingers of the extended left hand and pointed to by the index finger of the right hand, with little of the thoughtful discussion of ideas that happened naturally in English. I have come the hard way to understand why much of the objection to Communications has come from English people who have honestly felt that they were being crowded out. Communications has actually come to be a kind of stealing from English of its ancient birthright. The teaching of Language is far removed from the "I-tell-'em" attitude which dominates most Speech programs.

Perhaps the "I-tell-'em" program is all right for Michigan, or even for the West. But here in the South one gets a new point of view. I understand now why the University of Florida program is based upon Reading. We know down here that we don't yet know it all and that we seriously need this basic tool of communication. Since I came to the South, I have been making a study of what our particular students need most,

seeking advice in all departments of the college to find what is required of English and why there had been bitter complaints that Freshman English did not accomplish what it was supposed to accomplish. I had long been convinced that most teaching of grammar is a waste of time for writing. Its value for reading can likewise be legitimately questioned. Strange as it may seem, grammar is probably of more value to the speaker than to the reader or the writer. The stress, here in Alabama, at least, needs to be on Reading for Writing. The attitude, as in any Communications Course, needs to be asking, not telling. It seems to me that there is a possibility for more real democracy in the first than in the second.

I have come to be willing to leave to the Speech departments the professional aspects of speech which they are prepared to teach. I am even willing to wonder now if the answer to our problems should not have been sought in remodeling English rather than in combining it, or even putting it under the thumb of stand-up-and-talk Speech courses which were developed long after English had reached dignified maturity. If this seems heresy to my friends in Communications, they are welcome to know that I was deeply dissatisfied in two Communications programs and have come to a time of analyzing why, and what happened, and figuring out a direction I can take without turning back to what we had before anybody voiced an objection to English I as traditionally taught.

I am convinced that an adequate program can be set up within an English department without all the creaking machinery and red tape which has given Basic Communication courses the common title "Basic Confusion." There is no reason why speech work in English courses should not be the sort of by-

product that writing is in other courses—used for purposes of discussion toward writing, just as reading is used toward writing. Real writers work this way. I should like Mr. Middlebrook to know that I have taken special pains to study what real writers do and how they work, having been married to one for a long time and having the advantage of a good many literary friends along with the profound love and respect for literature which caused me to choose my particular field for a life's work.

Here in Alabama we have an especially serious problem. A recent library survey showed that 47 per cent of the state population has no access to library facilities of any kind. A reading-centered program will have to work from scratch here. But some of the suggestions for an English program are as follows:

1. A one-quarter reading class for students found to be retarded in either reading, writing, or speaking.
2. A reading clinic for further work needed beyond this.
3. Regular first-quarter Freshman English, with major emphasis upon reading at the beginning. Methods of teaching which provide the "breakdown" are being studied here with the needs of number- and thing-minded students especially in mind.
4. Booster sections to help people who need remedial grammar.
5. Regular second-quarter Freshman English, with more emphasis upon writing.
6. Special first- and second-quarter Freshman English for the better-prepared students. We must, as Conant and others say, educate the uncommon man, not merely specialize in keeping cripples going. Yet care should be taken to give to all students the English they require

for the writing and speaking needed in every profession.

7. More specialized classes for writing as connected with various technical professions, as well as classes in creative writing, perhaps best at the junior level.

8. Specialized work on graduate level for editors of technical and trade publications, etc., as well as for journalists and other writers.

Freshman English in particular is in need of further experiment in teaching methods. There are ways of letting students learn by doing, by group discussions of problems, and by group making of visual and thought aids which are explained to the class by students themselves. I have come to believe in forgetting the dignity of the printed page from time to time in order to demonstrate visually what language is and how it operates in sentences. This would take

another article to describe, of course; but a good deal of experimental work—with my own children as well as with my students—has convinced me that words and sentences *can* be handled, that visual aids and audio-visual aids of various kinds *are* effective in teaching number-minded young people the value and the use of language, as well as in helping them to stop being afraid of it.

I have a better feeling, a more productive feeling, about this work of making the teaching of English effective than I ever had in the long years I was engaged in a futile effort to reconcile Speech and English. I like very much having an opportunity of working in a part of the country which needs my help and says so. I even permit myself to return to the overview once in a while and think of what a more reading-minded South might accomplish in finding its own way to solve its problems.

## *The Teaching of Word Order*

BERTHA M. WATTS<sup>1</sup>

**S**ELDOM in the current textbooks in English is the grammatical device of word order given the important place which it deserves. Nor in our present teaching do we often take adequate account of the functional material which the linguists' observations of word order have made available. Such material, however, has a value that the teacher of Freshman English cannot afford to ignore.

What, exactly, is this value? What are the benefits which a college freshman

may derive from a study of English word order? First of all, if he is a student with even an average amount of intellectual curiosity, he is likely to enjoy knowing something about the part word order has played in the development of Modern English. While the history of the drift toward the modern natural order of words in English cannot, perhaps, be taught "as a series of hairbreadth escapes," as one remarkable teacher is said to have made Hebrew seem to his classes, it may be taught so that it will add zest and enjoyment to a course which most freshmen take chiefly, or solely, because it is required. Then, a knowledge of the

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uses of word order as a syntactic device may help the student to understand structural relationships and to gain skill in forming good sentences. And, finally, the student's observation and practice of the use of our natural English word order will furnish him with a criterion for judging the worth of any particular resistance to the pressure of word order. In other words, the study should enable him to discriminate between the natural resistance made by other grammatical devices, such as the older device of inflection, and the artificial resistance made by pedantic rules, as, for example, the eighteenth-century dictum against the "preposition at the end."

As a beginning of the study, attention may be directed to illustrative sentences from Old English, which, unlike Modern English, depended little on the positions of words as clues to their functions in expressing sentence meanings. Accustomed to the sentence patterns of Modern English, a freshman is likely to think the sentences of Old English jumbled and, at times, almost unintelligible because of their extremely free order of words. He will readily see that, as in German, the inverted order with the verb preceding the subject was in common use ("Then answered the king"); that there was an abundant use of the transposed order with the verb following the object ("They it neglected"); and that the complement of the verb had a free position either before or after the verb ("Fair words these are"; "They new are and unknown") or between the auxiliary and the main verb ("that ever men should so reckless become"). He may be led to observe also that predicates were often detached from their subjects in both independent and subordinate clauses ("Ye hither from afar as strangers have come"; "that she the practice of the Christian

faith and her religion unimpaired might hold") and that adjectives were placed at will before and after their nouns ("a cheerful giver"; "comrades three"; "old walls wide").

After a comparison of the free sentences of Old English with the Modern English sentence of firmly established word patterns, the class—ideally, at least—will want to know the answers to the questions "When?" and "Why?"

The former question cannot be answered definitely. For just when, in the development of the English language, word order began to take on importance as a grammatical device no historian of the language is prepared to say. There is, nevertheless, a general agreement that the observance of a uniform and restricted order did not come all at once but slowly, one step at a time, and that such observance came earlier in some dialects than in others. It is certain that even in Old English times the trend toward the loss of inflection which was characteristic of the language used in the north of England was balanced by the tendency to express ideas by means of a more stereotyped word order. Present-day linguists have found evidence that the change to normal order had undoubtedly begun before the Norman Conquest.

The answer to the question "Why?" not only should give the reason for the development of word order but also should show the relation of this development to the loss of inflection and the corresponding simplification of grammar. The student may be interested in noting Jespersen's opinion.<sup>2</sup> Briefly stated, it is that a fixed word order would come gradually as a natural result of a greater mental development and general maturity when the speaker's ideas no longer

<sup>2</sup> Otto Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*, pp. 261-63.

came into his mind helter-skelter but in orderly sequence. His theory is that the fixed word order came first and that the pressure of word order simplified grammar; he decries the "half-latent conception in people's minds" that inflection was first lost and that word order appeared afterward as a grammatical device to take its place.

The line of development in the fixing of word order, according to Jespersen's belief and that of other recognized authorities, was as follows: first, a period when words, placed according to fancy, were often provided with signs (inflections) to show relationships; next a period when the words retained the signs, but when there was a growing tendency toward regular positions and the use of function words; and, finally, a period of scant inflection, word order and function words being now sufficient to express most of the relations formerly shown by inflections. Sapir summarizes the history of "this all-important drift" by saying that, "as the inflected forms of English became scantier, as the syntactic relations were more and more adequately expressed by the forms of the words themselves, position in the sentence gradually took over functions originally foreign to it."<sup>3</sup>

Some students may be interested in knowing the extent to which this major trend toward fixed word order has made English into a highly analytic language such as Chinese or Siamese. In comparison with these languages, in which every word has its exact place and functions normally in no other place, Modern English maintains much more flexibility in word position; yet word order as the primary grammatical device in English has unquestionably brought that language

into a fairly close approach to the most highly analytic languages. To show the confirmation of this statement by an eminent Chinese writer, one may quote Lin Yutang's assertion that English, as it grows more analytic, approaches Chinese.

To give practical value to a study of word order, the attention of the student may be turned next to the questions, "What are the relationships for which word order provides expression?" and "How does it serve its important purpose in showing these relationships?"

In answering the first of these questions the instructor will find that both Sapir<sup>4</sup> and Fries<sup>5</sup> suggest some interesting material to share with the class. The subject-object relation is mentioned by Sapir, and later by Fries, as an "essential or unavoidable" grammatical relationship, and with it is classed another relationship—that of the modifier with what it logically modifies. The fact that both of these relationships depend primarily upon word order for their expression sets them apart from the "dispensable or secondary" relational concepts which are expressed mainly by means of inflections and function words.

How the device of word order functions in showing grammatical relations is a very important and practical question. At the outset it should be made clear that the essence of the principle of word order is simply this: that the relative positions words occupy—their particular sequence in the sentence—may reveal by this means alone the special function of each as subject, object, or other sentence element in conveying structural meaning.

Students may easily observe this principle at work in sentences. For example, the following sentences, though com-

<sup>3</sup> Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>5</sup> C. C. Fries, *American English Grammar*, p. 248.

posed of almost identical words, convey quite different meanings:

- The crew destroyed the bomb.
- The bomb destroyed the crew.
- Did the crew destroy the bomb?
- Did the bomb destroy the crew?

Here, as Sapir points out in similar examples, the two essential relational concepts—the concrete words indicating the subject and object—are expressed solely by their position before and after the verb. In no case is there doubt as to the relation which exists between these two concepts. Word order has made the relationship unmistakable. Moreover, the same device shows plainly which of the sentences assert the act of destroying and which ask a question about it.

Further observation may be made of such word groups as "Why was he late?" and "Where has the money gone?" in comparison with "why he was late" and "where the money has gone." It will be noted that word arrangement determines whether each group of words is a complete utterance and hence may be called a sentence or is merely a dependent clause. The class will be quick to note that an awkward expression like "Into the pen some corn the pigs were thrown" is not really an English sentence, for, although it has the essential sentence elements, it has not the English word order.

The observation of such sentences as "The huge dog chased the red fox" and of phrases like "boy choir" and "choir boy" or "home town" and "town home" will help the student to see that the position of each adjective before its noun makes the direction of modification perfectly clear and conveys the meaning intended.

It is essential to teach that two main principles govern word order: first, that ideas should be expressed in the order of the logical sequence natural to developed

thought; and, second, that related ideas should be placed as close as possible to each other. According to the first principle, English has firmly established as its chief pattern the so-called actor-action sentence, with the subject first, then the verb, and finally the object or complement. Observation will show that our declarative and imperative sentences normally use the actor-action pattern, though in the latter type of sentence the subject is seldom expressed.

The student may be interested in noting that, although the same pattern may be used in questioning, the inversion of the natural order has been in common use for questions throughout historical times. Shakespeare illustrates an old form of inversion in his *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Helena's question, "Call you me fair?" But since the fourteenth century when *do* came into use as a function word, that auxiliary and others such as *have*, *shall*, and *will* have normally occupied the first position in the question, with the subject second, and the main verb following the subject, as in "Do the children learn readily?" The transposed order—object or complement before the subject—is sometimes used in questions introduced by the interrogative pronoun or adjective, as in "Whom (*or* who) did you see?" "What day is this?"

The second principle mentioned above is of great importance to the student who wishes to use a clear, exact, and convincing style. According to that principle, modifiers may be slipped into the right place in the sentence pattern so that the direction of their modification is inescapably understood. Sentences which violate this principle are not far to seek. Virtually every "set" of freshman themes affords at least one illustration. For example, a GI writes of his Christmas hol-

idays in Los Angeles: "I saw men stopping to look at the display of expensive dolls and toy animals in overalls with dinner pails in their hands."

How to apply the basic principles of sentence order constitutes a highly significant part of the teaching of Freshman English. But hand in hand with that knowledge should go the judgment of when *not* to apply them. A large part of the charm of English expression lies in a flexibility which allows deviation from a stereotyped order. Besides the time-honored inversions and transpositions already mentioned, any change in order is freely allowed which meets the standard of good contemporary usage of the level required for the occasion and, generally speaking, which meets the standard of clear and effective style.

It is not within the scope of this article to describe fully the established positions of the several elements of the sentence or the possible deviations from these positions. The following are suggested as examples of the few grammars which give a detailed treatment of this aspect of word order: Sweet's *A New English Grammar*, Part II, for one of the earliest and most complete treatments; and Poutsma's *A Grammar of Late Modern English*, Volume I, for principles of word order which concern not only the syntax of English but matters of style as well. The primary purpose in a study of this aspect of word order is to guide the student's observation of the patterns and tendencies shown in the order of words in contemporary usage. Such observation should give him an awareness of standards and an increased consciousness of his own practices in meeting or in failing to meet these standards.

Observation may be guided also to help the student to note the natural conflicts which have come about between

word order and other syntactic devices and the artificial conflicts which occur when the pressure of word order meets the resistance of certain of the old Latin rules. To give, as a partial guide for observation, a brief view of some of the conflicts which may profitably engage the attention of freshmen is the remaining purpose here.

Important among these conflicts is that with the older usage of the inflected forms of some of the pronouns. When the interrogative or relative pronoun *who* stands in the normal subject position, there has been, since the early part of the sixteenth century, a tendency to abandon the inflection for the objective uses, though the pronoun retains its grammatical function as object. Evidence gathered by Fries shows that the tendency has firmly established itself,<sup>6</sup> the nominative being the form regularly employed in normal, unself-conscious usage when the position of the word is in "subject territory," as in Shakespeare's "Oh, Lord, sir, who do you mean?" and in its modern parallel, "Who do you refer to as witness?" Some linguists feel that this established usage heralds the general acceptance of *who* in place of *whom*. Sapir, for example, writing in 1929, asserted the belief that within a couple of hundred years *whom* will be as "delightfully archaic" as the Elizabethan *his* for *its*.<sup>7</sup> But Robertson represents a more conservative viewpoint in noting that the drift appears to be, not a tendency for the complete replacement of one traditional case form by another, but rather for the case forms to be interpreted in the broader way made possible by the pressure of word order.<sup>8</sup> He admits, however,

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Robertson, *The Development of Modern English*, p. 499.



that *whom* as a case form is considerably less impregnable than is commonly supposed.<sup>9</sup>

A second conflict of the same general nature concerns the use of the personal pronoun as the complement of a linking verb. Here the tendency is to substitute the objective form for the nominative form, as in "That was me." Two reasons for the tendency have been discovered: first, that the placing of the pronoun in the normal object position has predominated over traditional grammar as an influence in determining which form to use; and, second, that it is in accord with a general tendency, which Jespersen points out, to use the objective forms of the personal pronouns except where the pronoun is clearly the subject and where its subject relationship is shown by its close proximity to the verb. Scientific studies show that even in colloquial usage it is still a firmly established custom to employ the nominative as subject when it stands immediately before the verb, as in "She thought we were tired."

A very familiar conflict is that concerning the "split infinitive." The present writer recalls, from a long experience in teaching Freshman English, only one student who came to college without a consciousness of the strict grammatical edict not to split an infinitive. This unique individual had not heard of a split infinitive and with commendable curiosity asked his instructor "to split one" for his benefit. The rule, according to the statements of acknowledged scholars, was merely a whim of the eighteenth-century grammarians and has never had justification in usage. The principle of word order that places a modifier as close as possible to the word it modifies is opposed to the blanket rule and often favors the use of an adverb be-

tween the infinitive and its sign. The best users of English have found that the placing of an adverb in this forbidden territory sometimes adds to the quality and meaning of a sentence. Hence the student who goes on a hunt for split infinitives will find many examples in the usage of those who are painstaking in expressing their thought clearly, and he will, consequently, respect the reasonable conclusion of Krapp that "the split infinitive is not only a natural, but often an admirable, form of expression."<sup>10</sup>

The instructor may, if he desires, lead his class to observe the case for natural word order versus several other conflicting rules; but our final concern here will be with the artificial restriction of "no preposition at the end," which is said to have originated with Dryden. What despair that puristic poet would have felt in trying to "correct" a child's sentence once quoted in the *Saturday Review of Literature*: "What are you bringing that book that I don't want to be read to out of up for?"! Let the instructor, even if he is not a simon-pure purist, try, with his students, to make that into an end-prepositionless sentence! The principles of natural word order do not restrict the use of a preposition at the end of a sentence if that seems its place in the logical sequence of thought. The rule, which was never really applicable to English, is now less dwelt upon than formerly; but, even so, few students reach college without having been informed about it.

Such a study as the one suggested here should help to give the student an attitude toward Freshman English different from the antagonistic one he may develop if the approach is dogmatic. He will not have been asked, for example, to shun the "split infinitive" and the "dangling participle" simply because the ped-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 503.

<sup>10</sup> George P. Krapp, *Modern English*, p. 300.

ants have ostracized that wanton pair. Instead, let us hope he will have learned from it that grammar is really a study of the everyday language behavior of people like himself; that word order is a device which, in common with other

people, he may use to construct sentences packed with thoroughly understandable meaning; and, above all, that Freshman English *can* be interesting—if the vital aspects of language are not crowded out by prohibitions and rules.

## *Ends and Means in the General Course in Literature*

J. W. ASHTON<sup>\*</sup>

IT is often the practice among teachers in the humanities to object to the teaching of general or elementary courses in the sciences on the grounds that they are conducted as if all the students in the courses were preparing to become specialists in the field. But we in the humanities are often guilty of exactly the same fault, perhaps even to a greater degree. At least, the fault is more serious in our case, since the very nature of work in the humanities adapts itself—or should adapt itself—to the general rather than the highly specialized treatment.

If we wish to maintain the study of literature as one of the central disciplines in the humanities, that is to say, if we want the general course in literature to be central in the general-education curriculum, we must increasingly emphasize the humane and humanistic elements in the study of literature on this early level. Indeed, we must infuse a new spirit into such courses.

Much of our difficulty comes from a too hazy definition of our aims in the general course and too little concern whether the works included serve any substantial educational purpose. All too

frequently in the courses in general literature our selection of works and our approach to the material to be studied is not based on any really defensible conception of the general student's background, of his capacity for understanding literature, or of his general interest. All too frequently our decision as to the inclusion of a particular work in such a course is based solely upon a particular pleasure which we might take in teaching it in the course or on a feeling that such-and-such a work is not likely to be read by the student except as he is exposed to it in such a course.

If the general course in literature is to be an important part of general education, we have the great responsibility of bringing our students into contact with certain of the significant pieces of literature of the world, primarily those produced in the Western tradition of which we are a part and from which we get our chief imaginative and intellectual stimulus. We must bring our students into contact with that literature in such a way that they may become aware of the characteristics and meaning of the tradition (not as tradition alone but as a group of perennially challenging ideas and stimuli to the imagination) and, more impor-

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tantly, so that they may develop some feeling for the characteristics of human personality and the fundamental problems of life which are presented in those works. In addition, of course, we have the responsibility of giving the students at least some introduction to the purely aesthetic aspects of literature. For the great mass of students, however, this latter in its limited aspects at least is not so important as making them increasingly aware of the nature and qualities and problems of personality as they come out in great literature, whether it be lyric poetry or epic or novel or drama.

For the student in the general literature course the history of literature has no really defensible place at all, for I think that it is impossible to demonstrate any strictly historical development in the great works of literature from the Greeks to our own time. No one would deny that there are differences and variations. Relationships there are, obviously, and even in a limited way, developments, but the factor of time is by the very definition of great literature an inconsiderable factor in the literary patterns of succeeding generations. Certainly, as far as the general course is concerned, it is a factor of no particular importance. I think, for instance, that it would be impossible to show any significant line of historical development from the Greek drama and its theater to the drama and theater of the Elizabethans. The great Elizabethans can and do stand on their own feet, as do the great Athenians, however many interesting parallels we may wish to draw between them. Whatever truly historical development of the drama there may have been from Shakespeare to Eugene O'Neill, however interesting that may be in the development of an understanding of changing dramatic fashions and the

relationship between the form of the theater and the drama which is produced in it, it has no particular significance for the student in the general course, who is primarily concerned with literature as an interpretation of life. This is not, of course, to say that valuable comparisons cannot be made or that, the wider the student's acquaintance with literature may be, the richer it may not be. To understand Wordsworth's sonnets, it is not necessary to know the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey or even of Shakespeare, though it may be well to know them for their intrinsic merits. This, again, is not to say that as wide a reading as possible of sonnet and other lyric forms is not fruitful; it is only to say that there is no significant historical pattern that must be observed. Certainly as far as lyric poetry is concerned, it is not the history of poetry but the nature of the creative spirit and idea that is important for our purposes.

This carries with it certain implications. First of all—and I should like to emphasize this particularly—we are not justified in including in courses in general literature works whose significance is primarily that of a historical position; however significant *Beowulf* may be in the development of English literature, however valuable it may be as a picture of Anglo-Saxon ways of thinking, its inclusion in a general course in literature cannot be justified solely on that basis. The same would be true of a work like *Pier's Plowman* or Thomson's *Seasons* or Cooper's novels or any number of works which have some such kind of significance to the student of the history of literature but which do not have the intrinsic merit to warrant a place in the general program.

In the second place, we are not justified in including in the general course any

work on the grounds that "this is a book that everyone ought to be familiar with" without further and more exact definition. Why ought everyone to be familiar with it? In what does familiarity consist? (There may be raised real question as to whether there is any book with which everyone unqualifiedly ought to be familiar.) Such assertions perpetuate in the study of literature that suggestion of snob appeal or of genteel accomplishment which so often plagues it—which has, indeed, often plagued so much discussion of the place of the humanities generally in education. It implies an élite both in letters and in students, who master or rather too often have a superficial acquaintance with a series of works which are supposed to initiate them into the mysteries of polite society.

We are not offering courses in general literature—in many instances requiring them of all or nearly all our students—in order that we may produce people who are able to converse about Bacon's essays or Wordsworth's poetry or Thackeray's novels with an air of facility. We are concerned in the general course in literature with the development of those qualities of understanding which I mentioned earlier: with the extension of the student's intellectual and emotional experience so that he is more fully capable of meeting and understanding the experiences which he himself will need to face. This is not gentility. This is the hard, practical business of preparing students for the actualities of the world in which they live and in which they will take, we hope, an increasingly active sense of personal and social responsibility as they finish with their college work.

Third, we need to be far more realistic than we often are in the choice of works which can be approached by the student in the course in general literature. Per-

haps this is the crux of the whole matter. Specifically, no one perhaps would question that the *Divine Comedy* is a truly great piece of literature, but we would hope that no one in his senses would suggest that students in the general literature course be indiscriminately required to read either the whole work or even one of its major sections.

There is a double problem involved in such cases as this. The *Divine Comedy* is constructed on a very elaborate and intricate foundation of medieval thought. It is the result of Dante's own political and social experiences and is based on a very orderly and systematic theological and philosophical pattern. To read the *Divine Comedy* understandingly, one must have more than a modicum of knowledge of that kind of background, such as only the exceptional student in the general course would have. Indeed, it calls for a much broader literary and philosophical experience than many a teacher in the general course has. Then, too, there is the fact that the *Divine Comedy* does not lend itself readily to translation, and I know of no translation in English which makes the work into a comparable artistic production to what it is in the Italian.

However valuable works like the *Divine Comedy* are intrinsically, I would say that we must regretfully decide that they can have no place in the general literature course. In somewhat the same way, we would have to examine carefully such works as the *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*. Our decision as to whether or not such works can be included in such a course must rest almost entirely, I believe, on the question as to whether we are willing to take sufficient time to meet adequately the problems posed by study of these works. This involves some consideration of the audiences for whom



they were originally designed. They are both, for instance, in the best Renaissance pattern of learned works not intended for casual perusal by a popular audience but designed for readers who not only were familiar with both the well-known and the recondite stories of classical and biblical mythology but also were interested in the profound philosophical problems which are the central subjects of these two great works. "To justify the ways of God to Man" is no casual task to set one's self, nor is the setting-forth of the essential qualities of the truly great man. How is the teacher of literature to bring such works as these to students who have neither any familiarity with the basic stories which the poets used nor even the least knowledge of the far-reaching problems of freedom of the will or the redemption of mankind? Surely not by an hour or two of lecturing on such subjects. I think that in the end we will probably conclude that the *Faerie Queene* is still best designed for such a limited circle of readers as it was in Spenser's own time. The multiplicity of themes, each with its allegorical significance, the elaborate political allusion and satire, and the general intellectual attitude of Spenser require for students who have not grown up with a knowledge of the classical and medieval traditions, such as Spenser had and such as he expected of his readers, a far fuller and more extensive treatment of these materials than is likely to be possible within the limits of a required general course. The problem is much the same in the case of Milton, though here the relatively greater simplicity of the narrative and the—at least theoretically—greater familiarity of the students with the basic story may make it possible for us to do an adequate job within the limits of such a course. The contrast between the work of such men

and that of Shakespeare is notable. The breadth of Shakespeare's audience and hence the real simplicity and clarity of his work make possible a directness of approach to the work itself which is not possible in the case of these two other great figures of the Renaissance. The problem of free will in *Macbeth*, for instance, is so objectified and personalized by the dramatic method that it may be grasped by the novice.

Finally, and this is closely associated with what I have just been saying, in our reassessment of the values of literary study, I do not see how we can escape reading complete works rather than fragments: shreds and patches of the original. From the standpoint of general literature—indeed, from the standpoint of any course which concerns itself with masterpieces of literature—there is no justification for reading less than the whole masterpiece. The very fact that it is a masterpiece demands that it be read as a whole. To read five books of the *Odyssey* or an act of *King Lear* or two or three books of *Paradise Lost* is not to accomplish anything of real value in the study and understanding of literature.

This practice of dismemberment may be absurd on occasion, as in the case of a collection of chapters from nineteenth-century English novels which appeared some years ago, or as it often is in anthologies, where selections are so torn apart from their context that the student can have no idea of what he is reading about, to say nothing of understanding the work as literature. Or it may be completely misleading and give the student a quite mistaken impression of the nature of the work from which he reads. For years it has been customary for us to ask students to read one or two, or at the most three, books of *Paradise Lost* in our introductory courses. The result has been

that most such students have no idea what the work is really about. The statement that Milton intends "to justify the ways of God to Man" simply has no meaning for the students who know *Paradise Lost* only through the picture of Satan and the fallen angels as they plotted the destruction of mankind as an act of revenge. Is it any wonder, then, that most of them feel that Satan is really the hero of the poem, even though Milton did not intend him to be so. Furthermore, the students not only get a mistaken impression of the work but miss that magnificent analysis of moral values which Milton meant to be the chief subject of the poem. Again, even a well-made lecture or two summarizing the rest of the work is a far cry from that intimate association with greatness which should characterize the study of literature.

There is no substitute for the time that must be taken for an understanding and appreciation of that greatness.

Examples might be multiplied. I suppose literally thousands of students suppose that *The Canterbury Tales* consists only of the description of a group of thirty or so pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, though some of them may know that there is a "Knight's Tale" and a "Pardoner's Tale." Though a work like *The Canterbury Tales* lends itself more readily to consideration in part than other works, yet here, too, it is incumbent upon us that we see to it that the

student is given a full notion of the real scope of the work.

A general rule for us to follow would be that a work, to be included in the general course in literature, either exists as a whole or it does not exist at all. It is only through seeing a great piece of literature in its entirety that the student can hope to see and understand the full impact of the author upon the human problems which he treats in the work.

I have a feeling that the study of literature is in a crucial position. We have had an important place in the curriculum not only of liberal arts but also in the professional and preprofessional areas for many decades. We have been offered a great opportunity to enrich the experience of thousands of students by bringing them into contact with great literature. We are in danger of losing the opportunity of making that contact rich and meaningful by frittering away our time on irrelevancies, on minor matters, and on fragments. The study of modern literature is no more fundamentally secure in the curriculum today than the study of the classics was a few generations ago. It can continue to occupy an important place only so long as we, the teachers of literature, refrain from scattering and debilitating that study—only so long as we are ourselves so convinced of the significance of literature as a commentary on and interpretation of life that we offer not a shoddy substitute but the real greatness of literature in our general courses.

## Round Table

### A RESEARCH EXERCISE FOR FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

I have used successfully in Freshman Composition an exercise that combines a personal essay with the simple elements of research and thus serves as a transition between the informal essay, with which the students are familiar, and the longer investigative paper, which is, for the most part, a new experience. I have found over a period of years that the introduction of research material in easy stages is particularly helpful to freshmen, who, because of their general confusion and subsequent antagonistic attitude toward anything new, are likely to find the shift from the informal essay to the strictly formal paper one of the rough spots in the course.

At Hunter College all incoming students are provided with a printed booklet entitled *A Guide to Good Form in Writing*, which explains in detail the mechanics of the research paper, with special emphasis on the preparation of the bibliography and the writing of footnotes; I devote one period to an analysis of the *Guide* and to a discussion of note-taking and the use of bibliography cards, to the difference between direct quotation and paraphrase, and to the importance of accuracy in all phases of research. These preliminaries having been attended to, my girls are ready for the simple exercise that rarely fails to arouse their curiosity and that therefore has proved its merits as a first step on the road to fact-finding.

Keeping in mind the normal experiences of young people, I assign to each girl a famous quotation with a slight moral, such as "An honest man's the noblest work of God," "Beware the fury of a patient man," "Pray you now, forget and forgive," "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well," "When sorrows come, they come not

single spies but in battalions," "Procrastination is the thief of time," "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," "The woman that deliberates is lost," "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread," "Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today," and so forth. The reaction of the class as the twenty or twenty-five quotations are distributed is always interesting. All the maxims prove to be familiar, but very few, if any, can be placed as to author or work. Thus the research project develops naturally out of the students' inquisitiveness, and so, without realizing it, the class is ready for the assignment, which is given as follows: first, each girl is to consult either Stevenson's *The Home Book of Quotations* or Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* for the name of the author of her particular sentence and the title of the work in which it is contained, the information to be jotted down on her first bibliography card with the page reference; next, she is to gather, from one of the histories of English literature or an encyclopedia, the main facts in the author's life, recording on her second bibliography card and additional note cards the dates of her author, other interesting biographical data, and the titles of his best-known works; finally, she is to write a paper, the first part to be a statement of the facts, accurately documented, and the second to be a personal theme interpreting the quotation in the light of her own experience. The miniature bibliography at the end of the paper completes the exercise.

Since there are hundreds of quotations similar to those suggested above, the exercise may be used semester after semester with little or no repetition; more important, the students really enjoy the little research that is required because, probably for the first time, they sense the need to satisfy their own curiosity, and, lastly, they usually

write the familiar essay with more enthusiasm than had ever before been exhibited because they feel a very close kinship with the quotation on which they have been working and which has become distinctively their own.

The one point that I should like to add to justify my faith in this assignment is that almost every student, upon completing the exercise, is ready and eager to start work on the longer research paper.

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### UNIVERSAL ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT

In September, 1947, the University of Bridgeport inaugurated its universal English program, which had been developed, during the early months of that year, in a series of conferences between President James Halsey and Dr. Helen M. Scurr, chairman of the English department. This program, designed to improve the quality of undergraduate writing, required students to maintain, and instructors to enforce, the standards of the English department in all classes, regardless of subject. Two trial semesters have indicated that this device is both administratively feasible and pedagogically effective, and the university has decided to incorporate it in its permanent plans.

The program was adopted as a response to the very widespread criticism of the writing skills of American college graduates. To some extent the strictures are no doubt exaggerated, but, nevertheless, they point to an undeniable fundamental truth: many college graduates are surprisingly poor writers, and both industry and graduate schools insistently demand an improvement in this respect.

One cause, very probably a major cause, of this situation is the gap between the standards of the English department and those actually enforced by other departments. Composition training is usually completed in the freshman year; thereafter, a

series of important reports is submitted to instructors who naturally emphasize substance rather than expression. There is an inevitable slackening of literary standards. At the University of Bridgeport, faculty members have occasionally criticized the writing of particular students only to have the students defended by their former English teachers; sometimes even old themes have been produced in evidence that the student could write satisfactorily and had done so while under technical instruction.

It is at this disparity between capacity and actual performance that the universal English program is directed. It is assumed that the upperclassman who has received a passing grade in composition has been taught how to write acceptably. The problem thus is to force him thereafter to do so.

Under the universal English program, all members of the faculty have been directed to refuse written work which does not meet prescribed minimum standards of expression. Unsatisfactory papers are not penalized in grade; they are simply refused. Nor are deficiencies in expression indicated. The burden is placed squarely where it belongs—on the student. He must re-write the paper, which is first accepted for grading when it is submitted in amended form. He is thus realistically penalized for doing a job badly—by having to do it twice. Almost inevitably, he incurs a further penalty for late submission of work; but it is a matter of indifference to the program whether he is penalized at all. What matters is that he has been forced to apply what he has learned.

Both students and faculty have been supplied with statements of the standards of the program. The set provided for the students is precise, stringent, and minute; that for the faculty is general and flexible and is intended as a rough guide rather than an explicit instruction. In this way, the conscientious student will be led to do more than is required to suit his instructors. Such matters as neatness, punctuation, spelling, grammar, sentence structure, clearness, and organization are covered in both sets. A paper which fails on any single count is unacceptable.



The English department contributes to the program by maintaining an informal clinic in composition. A student who desires help may attend one or more meetings of this clinic, which meets three times a week. Seriously deficient students may be required to take additional formal courses in composition as a prerequisite for graduation.

Some consideration, of course, is given to papers prepared in class, under stress of time and without recourse to the usual aids. In the same spirit, students currently studying composition are exempted from the full rigors of the program. However, certain reasonable minimum standards may be imposed upon college students under all circumstances. The occasional student who cannot meet these, even with the assistance of the clinic, has proved himself not to be college material.

The faculty of the University of Bridgeport has accepted this program most cooperatively. It involves no "red tape" and a minimum of administrative interference in the classroom; it is flexible enough to permit the application of an instructor's private standards; and it eases the instructor's burden. He is given no additional task to perform, and he is permitted to refuse to read an obscure, illiterate, illegible, or simply slovenly paper.

Most important of all, the program promises to contribute much to the education of his students. It does not pretend to be a magic cure-all, but it does force the student to maintain high standards of expression in all the more important writing that he does in the four years of his college education. It cuts across department lines and teaches him to apply in one class what he has learned in another. The value of such a discipline in forming correct habits, both of expression and of general work, should be considerable. A year's trial has suggested most emphatically that it will be so.

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# MR. POPE IMPROVED

Because a morass of conventional examination questions irks instructor as well as student, I tried an experiment this past semester in my course on English literature of the eighteenth century. Three of the nineteen students in the class were graduates, while the rest were juniors and seniors. In the one-hour midterm examination I gave three rather commonplace questions and ended with this fourth question:

The following selections, though not on your reading list, are by familiar poets. The asterisks indicate omitted lines. You are to write appropriate lines to be inserted instead of the asterisks.

a) Know, Nature's children all divide her care;  
The fur that warms a monarch, warm'd a bear.

While Man exclaims, "See all things for my use!"

"See man for mine!" replies a pamper'd goose;

\* \* \* \* \*

Who thinks all made for one, not one for all.—POPE.

Please do not reach for your copy of Pope and look for lines 43-48 of the third epistle of the *Essay on Man*. Instead, examine the following verses and try to decide which is the original line by Pope. At the end of this article you will find the answer, but do not peek now. If you want to work a bit harder, guess which lines were written by graduates and which lines by undergraduates.

1. He fails to see God's pattern and must fall
2. For such presumption low then each shall fall
3. A blinded donkey wandered from his stall
4. Who breaks the chain is headed for a fall
5. And just as short of reason he must fall
6. He does not know that he will surely fall
7. He mars God's plan for this terrestrial ball
8. He has a wretched brain full blank and small
9. And that one witless the wise will call
10. His pride is only asking for a fall

Will you agree with me that the results are extraordinary? These lines were written

not by poets in undistracted communication with the Muses but by harried students watching the last ten minutes of a quiz expire in sweat and anguish.

The second part of this write-in question read:

b) There, Science! veil thy daring eye;

\* \* \* \* \*

In that divine abyss;  
To Faith content thy beams to lend,  
Her hopes t'assure, her steps befriend,  
And light her way to bliss.—AKENSIDE.

Again, do not turn to lines 49-54 of "Hymn to Science," but seek for Akenside's own line amid the following:

11. Lest you fall back by striving high
12. Forbid! its searching beam to spy
13. Do not contend with divinity
14. Nor dive too deep, nor soar too high
15. Nor seek to show the reason why
16. To show men all, dare not to try
17. Seek not to look as from on high

As a change in pace, the last selection was:

c) Here Reynolds is laid, and, to tell you my mind,

He has not left a wiser or better behind;  
His pencil was striking, resistless and grand,  
His manners were gentle, complying and bland;  
Still born to improve us in every part,

\* \* \* \* \*—GOLDSMITH

Perhaps you can repeat from memory these lines (137-42) from "Retaliation," but note, anyway, how successfully some of the following lines match the lilt of the original.

18. That Reason might teach us the skill in true Art
19. Still living before us in eloquent Art
20. He didn't succeed, for he follow'd a chart
21. His pencil our faces, his manners our heart
22. His mind was so noble, and golden his heart
23. He tastefully shew'd us the bound'ries of Art
24. T'improve the mind while he touch'd the heart
25. Made Nature comply to the force of his Art

Now for the answers. Pope wrote line 5, Akenside wrote line 14, and Goldsmith wrote line 21. Graduate students wrote lines 1, 9, 11, 16, and 24. The other lines were written by undergraduates. Of the nineteen students in the class, the only person who misunderstood the question and failed to submit any lines of verse was, of course, a graduate student.

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### THE OVEREDITED ANTHOLOGY

The literary critics never stoop to reviewing textbooks; they devote their talents and efforts to less important projects, such as determining which of two bad novels by a second-rate author is the less execrable or why some totally unintelligible modern poet is more "important" than some other totally unintelligible modern poet. The consideration that a textbook may be not only read but actually studied by tens of thousands of young men and women whose reading habits and tastes may be thereby influenced for life is overlooked by the reviewers. Perhaps they reason that no one except students ever reads textbooks and that the students have little choice in the matter. Someone should call to their attention that no one at all ever reads the unintelligible poets and that the readers of second-rate novels never read reviews.

The irony is that these same critics are the first to harangue us about the immaturity of the American reading public—its distaste for all mental effort, its insatiate love of sensationalism, its lack of discrimination—in a word, its general ignorance. Now it so happens that the majority of American readers are college graduates and that their reading habits have been in part, at least, formed in college classes for which textbooks were bought if not used. It also happens that many of these textbooks are edited in such a manner as to encourage the same intellectual sloth that our literary pundits decry and to discourage the alertness and knack at analysis that are essential to intelli-

gent reading. Not all textbooks promote these tendencies, but all too many of them, in ever increasing numbers, do.

Perhaps the most common type of text in our college courses in literature is the survey anthology—a ponderous, double-columned, often double-volumed, compendium in which representative selections of an entire literature, such as English or American, are presented by periods. It is a question, of course, whether the better way to reveal a literature is through a multitude of snippets from great as well as small authors, or through a lesser number of complete works solely by first-rate writers. But this is a problem irrelevant to our purpose here. Since the anthology is still the most popular instrument of instruction in our colleges, what are the reading habits that it inculcates?

To answer this question, let us look at a recent and highly typical anthology of American literature, one that is finding use throughout the nation. Entitled *The Literature of the United States*, it is compiled and edited by Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, and Randall Stewart, three of the greatest living authorities on our national letters, and men of unimpeachable scholarship and taste. No one will complain of the selections these men have placed in their book. Each author is copiously and tellingly represented. One could hardly imagine a more attractive and comprehensive compilation of American belles-lettres. Also, I am sure that these editors—all three of them great teachers—believe in inspiring their student-readers to independent analysis and comparison in their voyage through the book. Yet, while I am sure the editors had this view in mind, I cannot conceive of a method more destructive of this end than the method they have followed.

To choose at random an author from the many anthologized in this textbook, let us see what the editors have done with Frank Norris. The main selections from Norris are, appropriately enough, taken from *The Octopus*. From reading only a few chapters of *The Octopus* the reader of average intelli-

gence will become aware of a certain outlook on life that forms the basis of the novel. It is the function of the student to put his finger on this theme and to be able to state it in his own words. Until he has done so, he has not understood the novel. The teacher must encourage him to read and think until he has achieved this first step in the intelligent reading of any book. Presumably by repetition of the process the student will automatically bring more and more analytical thinking to bear on his reading until he becomes the discriminating, aware sort of person that an author likes to write for. After all, it is only common sense—the simple understanding of what one reads.

The editors of the anthology in question, however, do not apparently wish to encourage the student to think about what he is reading, for they tell him, before he begins the selection, exactly those things that he should discover for himself either in his individual reading or in class discussion, but which he should never be told outright. In the case of *The Octopus* the student is informed that Norris was a naturalist who saw life governed by immutable biological and economic laws; that wheat—the symbol of the earth's great principle of fertility—is one of these determining laws; and that Norris conceived of his work as a prose epic. Now all these facts about Norris are implicit in the selections that the editors give us. To tell the student of them in the introductory notes only spoils the student's enjoyment (if he has any brains and is in the habit of using them) and defeats the chief aim of education in a democracy—the encouragement of individual thought.

Examples of this sort could be multiplied indefinitely. The introduction to Stephen Crane's poetry lists exactly those points—Crane's vivid imagery, terseness, irony—that the student should find for himself. The introduction to Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*—a work significant mainly as the prototype of the modern detective story—contains a list of all the characteristics of the "who-dun-it" exemplified in Poe's story, characteristics obvious, upon a

little thought, to the reader of any perception whatsoever. It is not vital, naturally, that the student recognize that Dupin is the forerunner of all other fictional detectives from Sherlock Holmes to Hercule Poirot; but part of the student's pleasure and part of his education in discriminating reading depend on just such recognitions, arrived at independently and not ladled out by a nursemaid. After all, what is the use of reading a book if you are told all the important things about it before you start reading it?

The footnotes in this, as in many other similar anthologies, are only slightly less offensive than the introductions. On a double-columned page containing a selection from Howells' *Criticism and Fiction* we find notes identifying Zola, Vincenzo Monti, several characters from Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, and Jane Austen. Zola and Dumas, who are named by Howells in the text, obviously could and should be looked up by the possibly puzzled student in any dictionary, where could be found exactly the information—simply the nationality and the dates of the writer—given by the editors. The note on Monti is a waste of type and paper, since Howells in the text has already identified him as an Italian poet of the nineteenth century, and the editors add nothing to this information. The note on the Balzac characters is admittedly helpful; it

may even save a trip to the library, though worse calamities than a trip to the library have been known to befall a student. The identification of the "divine Jane" as Jane Austen is also permissible. Thus, half of the notes on this page are unnecessary, one or two of them are insults to the intelligence of the reader, and all of them discourage the student from finding out anything for himself. Yet these factual notes are relatively innocuous; it is when the notes are used like the introductions, to point out attitudes, comparisons, meanings, that they are downright harmful.

For the sake of specific examples I have had to single out one anthology for criticism. The same objections may be made, I repeat, against many other anthologies. The tendency is to create, through excessive editing, a reading situation that is totally unreal, so that later the student will find himself poorly equipped as a general reader. It is undoubtedly necessary to edit the Greek and Latin classics to the hilt, particularly when presented in the original languages. It should be a warning to those who present modern literatures similarly that the Greek and Latin languages remain notably unread today, even in the schoolrooms.

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### *What's in a Name?*

I haven't a scholarly yen  
For titles called "—— Once Again."  
And I think it a maddening bore  
To read titles like "—— Once More."

NORMAN NATHAN

CITY COLLEGE, NEW YORK



## Current English Forum

HAROLD B. ALLEN, JULIUS BERNSTEIN, MARGARET M. BRYANT (*chairman*)  
JAMES B. MCMILLAN, KEMP MALONE, RUSSELL THOMAS

### THAN

Last week a student began a sentence: "This novel is different than . . .," stopped, then went on, "different from. . . ." Hands rose, and other students asked the inevitable questions: "Is it *different from* or *different than*?" "Is *bigger than me* correct?" These are questions of divided usage which arise every semester, although my students assure me that their high-school instructors spent much time impressing on them that the idiom was *different from* the grammatical construction, *bigger than I*.

*Than* when used as a subordinating conjunction to introduce adverbial clauses following an adjective or adverb in the comparative degree arouses no question. In such sentences as *The oil supply situation is easier now than it has been for many months. It is the virtue of Mr. Eliot that he has caught and expressed, especially in "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," this malaise better than any other poet of his time*, it conveys the meaning of "when, as, or if compared with."

Occasionally, there is inversion of subject and verb in the clause introduced by *than*: . . . *the new legislative body "undoubtedly will be more sympathetic to our program than was the Eightieth Congress."* Fowler calls such a construction awkward and graceless. He says that it arises from a misconception of the writer that, because of the length of the subject, the inversion is necessary to save the verb from going unnoticed. But he is also careful to say that such constructions are not incorrect.<sup>1</sup>

However, conflicting usage with regard to *than* arises primarily from expressions which grammarians have cited and made prescrip-

tions about, particularly, as mentioned above, *different than, than me*.

The adjective *different* has the meaning "apart, other, unlike." The purist insists, therefore, that the only preposition consonant in meaning with this word is *from* and that the idiom is properly *different from*, to make clear the idea of "apartness, separation." However, in his discussion of the British colloquialism *different to*, Fowler writes:

That [*different*] can only be followed by *from* and not by *to* is a Superstition. Not only is *to* "found in writers of all ages" (OED) the principle on which it is rejected (You do not say *differ to*; therefore you cannot say *d. to*) involves a hasty and ill-defined generalization.<sup>2</sup>

So actually is the proscription of *different than* a superstition. The purist says that *different* does not indicate comparison. Is this quite true? When one object is said to be "different," is not another object being used as a basis of reference? Is not comparison—as well as unsimilarity—implicit in such an expression? It is on the basis of such an implied comparison that the combination *different than* has arisen. *Different than*, as the quotations in the OED show, has been used by Addison, Steele, Defoe, Richardson, Miss Burney, Coleridge, DeQuincey, Thackeray, and Newman; for two centuries it has been an idiom present in the usage of those writers who are models of English prose style.

In sharp contrast to the usage of these authors are the conflicting statements of grammarians and dictionary makers. *Webster's*, for instance, permits *different than* but prefers *different from*; *Funk and Wagnalls'* prefers *different from* and calls *different than* a "colloquialism." Such records of usage as Jespersen, Mencken, Fowler, and Horwell

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), "than."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, "different."

permit *different than* as well as *different from*. These men are opposed by Opdycke, Kennedy, and Curme, who call *different than* incorrect and vulgar in formal writing.

The underlying meaning of an expression is ultimately the basis for the selection of a given idiom. If separation is meant, then the expression *different from* is correct usage: *That woman is different from anyone I have ever known*. If, however, comparison is meant, then *different than* is the idiom to use: *The younger generation does not act differently than it did a century ago*.

The conflict has arisen, not from usage, which has found both constructions useful tools to express a given meaning, but because prescriptive grammarians have attempted to eradicate the one in favor of the other. That they have had only partial success is indicated by the fact that both expressions exist in contemporary written usage. However, since the purist has succeeded in raising a doubt as to the correctness of *different than*, this construction is now used less frequently than *different from*.

The use of *than* as a preposition, especially when followed by the personal pronoun in the objective case, is another instance in which there is divided usage and an attempt on the part of the prescriptive grammarian to eliminate the offending construction. Most college grammars label such expressions as *He was a better boxer than me* vulgar and colloquial. Yet a parallel usage such as . . . *an eminent judge than whom none is more just* is accepted as good written usage. Not only is this proscription of the use of *than* when followed by a pronoun in the objective case illogical, it is also—as was the case above—contrary to the records of written usage as found in the quotations cited in the *OED* from the sixteenth century on: 1560 Bible: *fooles wrath is heavier then them both*. Goldsmith, 1762: *I am not less than him*. . . . Scott, 1815: . . . *to be wiser than her*. G. B. Shaw: *It is sometimes greater than me*.

The most frequent reason given for not accepting this construction is that it is ambiguous. Fowler writes:

If [*you treat her worse than me*] means "you treat her worse than I treat her," . . . *than* is

not a conjunction . . . but a preposition governing *me*.

Doubts whether a word is a preposition or a conjunction or both are not unknown; . . . recognition of *than* as a preposition makes some sentences ambiguous that could otherwise have only one meaning, and is to that extent undesirable.<sup>3</sup>

But *than* is used as a preposition in expressions involving other words than pronouns. Curme writes: "Sometimes the gerund seems to stand in a comparative clause, while in reality the construction is a prepositional phrase . . . *I didn't dare go farther than merely suggesting it*."<sup>4</sup> Very similar to this use are two examples that I found: *West Point knows better than to expect anything except a dog fight in the Philadelphia Municipal Stadium on Nov. 21*; *There is no encouragement for the belief that compromise can achieve more than a truce*, where *to expect* and *truce* can be construed only as objects of a preposition.

However, the use of *than* as a preposition occurs most frequently in a stereotyped form of expression usually composed of adjectives or adverbs in the comparative degree followed by a limiting phrase designating quantity:

The meeting lasted more than two hours. . . . All four vessels were built for the American Export Lines . . . less than four years ago. But the anonymity will leave more than one push button intellectual tossing fitfully on his bed of anguish next summer. Baron Kiichiro Hiranuma, 62, . . . a powerful figure in Japan for more than a quarter of a century. . . .

A distinction must be made between the constructions which I call "prepositional phrases" and elliptical clauses. The elliptical clauses among my examples<sup>5</sup> fall into two categories: (1) Those in which the verb and predicate are missing—*Japan did not seem*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "than."

<sup>4</sup> George O. Curme, *Syntax* (New York: D. C. Heath & Co., 1931), p. 305.

<sup>5</sup> The material for this article was based on examples found in two issues of the *New York Times*, November 4, 5, 1948, and two issues of the *Columbus (Ohio) Evening Dispatch*, November 12, 13, 1948, as well as the authorities cited.

more aggressive than the rest of the world nations—and (2) those in which the subject and verb are missing—*Mr. Tallamy said present indications were that 1948 shipments would be greater than for any year since 1940*. Clauses in the latter category resemble very much the constructions I have labeled “prepositional,” in that the words in the expression have objective force. Certainly, it is probably on the analogy of such constructions that the above examples of the use of *than* as a preposition arise.

The difference between the two constructions becomes clearer when one attempts to supply the ellipsis in the clauses. The words that one inserts—as is obvious—are repetitions of words or rephrasings of ideas already stated in the sentence: for example, *James Stewart . . . shows up much better than (he has) in any of his previous . . . efforts*. To do the same thing in the constructions I have labeled “prepositional” is difficult; the “missing” words cannot be inferred from the rest of the sentence and, if inserted, make an awkward circumlocution out of what is usually a clear, modifying phrase. The two following sentences, I think, put the conjunctive and prepositional use of *than* in sharp contrast: *In Singapore now there are 30,000 more births than deaths each year. More than 300 teachers are attending the education workshop*. In the prepositional phrase of the second sentence the element of comparison is slight. The force of the phrase is merely to make the adjective *more* more specific.

Although the foregoing discussion shows that *than* is frequently used as a preposition, such constructions as *My brother Lonnie was bigger than me* is probably to be regarded as colloquial usage. The two examples of this usage that I found in my survey occurred in the ghost-written autobiography of Joe Louis and obviously represent an attempt on the part of the writers to reproduce what Mencken calls “the common language.”

Just as the purists in their attempt to eradicate the use of expressions such as *than me* have overlooked the use of *than* as a preposition in other contexts, so also have

they failed to record the use of *than* to introduce subordinate adjective clauses. *Than* appears frequently in combination with *more* and *less*. These adjectives are occasionally used as indefinite pronouns.<sup>6</sup> When this functional change occurs, a *than* clause modifying the pronoun takes on the function of an adjective. I found many examples of this usage: *It represents, despite the subsequent increase in population, less than the total vote cast four years ago. The country realized that placing a president in the “White House” is a little more than just being a Republican. The issues were among the more than 200 local proposals appearing on ballots. . . .*

Finally, there is one more use of *than* that is rarely mentioned by the authorities. In combination with *more* it is frequently used as an adverb having the meaning “not merely”: *. . . the plant is now operating at maximum and expenses of service have more than offset higher income. They more than doubled to \$5,119,000 in 1945. . . .*

In recapitulation, I would say that present-day Standard English sanctions the use of *than* as a subordinating conjunction to introduce adverbial and adjective clauses, as a preposition to introduce adverbial and adjective phrases, and occasionally, in combination with *more*, as an adverb. In the cases of divided usage discussed, the inversion of the subject and verb in a clause introduced by *than* is not incorrect, though it has been called awkward; *different than* is permissible in written usage when comparison is meant, although the prescriptive grammarian has raised such doubts as to its correctness that it occurs less frequently than the expression *different from*; the grammatical construction *than me* is colloquial usage, largely because of the efforts of the prescriptive grammarians.

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<sup>6</sup> Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar* (4th ed.; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1936), Vol. II, sec. 11.61.

<sup>7</sup> Curme, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

## Report and Summary

### About Education

TWO COLLEGE ENGLISH CONFERENCES for discussing ways and means of improving the teaching of Freshman English will be held in April.

At the convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in November the group considering "Required Freshman English" asked that a longer conference on the subject be held in the spring. It will be in the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, morning and afternoon, Friday and Saturday, April 1 and 2. John C. Gerber, State University of Iowa, is chairman of the directing committee and George S. Wykoff of Purdue is co-chairman.

The following week, April 8-9, Canterbury College, Danville, Indiana, will be host to teachers from small colleges and high schools in Indiana, southern Illinois, and western Ohio. Miss Bertha Watts, Canterbury College, is program chairman. This conference will be conducted chiefly by way of small workshops and discussion groups limited to about twenty-five persons each. Under experienced leaders, those attending will grapple with such questions as "How shall we motivate freshman composition?" "What should freshmen read?" "How can we achieve better articulation between high-school and college English?"

RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION on the college campus is frankly discussed by Howard Whitman in a two-installment article, "The College Fraternity Crisis" (*Collier's*, January 8 and 15). The first instalment describes in very specific terms the secret clauses in the charters of many national fraternities which calmly indorse discriminatory practices. However, "paced by the storm at Amherst," the antidis-

crimination fight is "hopping from campus to campus," stimulated very largely by students back from the war disgusted by the snobbishness and silliness of fraternity attitudes. A new national fraternity, "an intercultural fraternity," Beta Sigma Tau, was founded in Chicago last May. By fall it had chapters on seven campuses and by November four more. Although much remains to be done, at least democracy is moving into action on this long-neglected field.

ADULT EDUCATION IS NEEDED IN practically every community. *Adult Education Ideas* is a four-page leaflet issued by the Division of Secondary Education of the United States Office of Education. Its second issue (December) features "Articulation of Secondary and Adult Education." Its suggestions, although addressed to principals, can for the most part be carried out by individual teachers. Here they are, stripped to the bone: (1) See that all teachers and other staff personnel are fully acquainted with the local adult education opportunities. (2) Train teachers to develop in youth the concept of lifelong education. (3) Be especially sure that guidance people know about adult education opportunities. (4) Arrange for pertinent data on drop-outs to flow from the guidance department to the director of adult education. (5) Encourage seniors to get a taste of adult education. (6) Encourage secondary teachers to use adaptations of adult methods. (7) Help high-school people to develop long-term educational plans. (8) Explain to seniors the opportunities in the adult education program. (9) Plan the continuation of high-school interest groups. (10) Design and develop special activities to meet the needs and interests of out-of-school youth.



A FILM STRIP ON THE "HOME OF Shakespeare" is offered by the British Information Services, 39 South La Salle Street, Chicago 3. Twenty-six frames, \$1.00.

THE FOURTH ANNUAL "ENCAMPment for Citizenship" will be held June 29-August 8 at the Fieldston School, Riverdale, New York, for young people between the ages of seventeen and twenty-three. Last year about a hundred and fifty of them of all races, creeds, and economic statuses gathered there to live and study together for six weeks. This year the number is expected to be larger. Sponsored by the American Ethical Union, the Encampment's aim has been to help prepare young Americans for responsible, informed leadership and effective citizenship. Some campers pay their own way; others are sent by labor unions,

sharecropper groups, 4-H clubs, and other organizations. A few scholarships are available. A diversified group, they live together, govern themselves, and through discussion groups, workshops, visual aids, field trips, etc., grapple with the basic philosophy of democracy, its mechanisms and instrumentalities, and its concept as an ordering of human relations. Those in charge are not interested in furthering any particular party, economic doctrine, or religious dogma. Among the persons who will discuss problems with the campers will be staff representatives from the United Nations, the American State Department, settlement houses, the Urban League, the American Civil Liberties Union, labor unions, and the National Association of Manufacturers. For further information address: Encampment for Citizenship, 2 West Sixty-fourth Street, New York 23, New York.

### *About Literature*

"THE CRITIC'S BUSINESS" BY FOUR of the critics occupies a considerable section of the winter *Kenyon Review*, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary. William Barrett in "A Present Tendency in American Criticism" considers that the critic has begun to cut himself off from literature and that there never has been a period in the past in which the main body of contemporary literature was to definitely removed from its contemporary critics as is the case today. R. P. Blackmur, taking a "Second Look," believes that during the last ten years John Crowe Ransom in his editing of the *Kenyon Review* has restored what used to be called the *aesthetic* to good standing. Critical writing in the *Review* has been concerned chiefly with poetry. He thinks that the novel needs the same examination. Richard Chase writes on the distinctions between the "New and the Ordealist" criticism. Ordealist criticism took its lead from the early Van Wyck Brooks. The ordealists, he says, "have been interested in the suffering and failure of the artist and in his es-

trangement from society, rather than primarily in the books he wrote." They "speak of art as a cry of pain rather than as a moral utterance." The new critics "usually assume that art has nothing to do with morality." A mobile balance needs to be struck. Allen Tate contributes "A Note on Autotelism." The New Criticism, he writes, sprang up to show us how to read the New Literature. When "insights into the meanings of a work become methodology, when the picture apologizes to the frame, we get what has been called autotelic criticism." Kenneth Burke's "Grammar of Motives" is an example. Tate doesn't think it as important as literary criticism. Any criticism that increases our knowledge of literature and its availability has its place, he thinks; only the size of the place is in question. There "can be no end to the permutations of the criticism relative to literature, philosophy and religion. The New Criticism offers as many permutations as criticism in the past has offered and probably more."

A SUMMARY AND APPRAISAL OF "Recent Trends in American Verse" by Henry W. Wells appears in the October *English*. Some of the trends which Mr. Wells perceives are these: American poetry today has failed to crystallize into pronounced or conscious movements; there is still a drastic divorce between poetry approved by the critics and that which the larger part of the reading public enjoys; American verse has grown more sensitive than ever to cosmopolitan influences; the subjectivist tendency is conspicuously advanced by several poets who more nearly than any other group in America constitute a movement (Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and Randal Jarrell); the changing attitudes toward some of the older poets indicate increasing unrest in literary circles; the older men are the most satisfactory but still do not satisfy enough; neither American poetry as an art nor any single poet can be said to be widely popular or deeply influential.

TWO ARTICLES ABOUT ROBERT FROST, both by his longtime friend Sidney Cox, of Dartmouth, appear in recent magazines. The *Educational Record* for October presents "Some Educational Beliefs and Practices of Robert Frost." Quickening the desire for "play of mind" seems to be Frost's central objective. His methods of inducing such mental activity in students are varied and likely to be improvised rather than preplanned. His lectures, always informal, are felt by some to be intellectual rambling; by others to be perceptive exploration, with discoveries. He does not expect immediate effects upon most hearers.

"Robert Frost and Poetic Fashion" in the winter issue of the *American Scholar* insists that Frost has always ignored the intellectual fads of the moment, has been too subtle to be understood and properly valued. Richard Hovey told him that his verse was not poetic because it sounded too much like talk. Others made similar misjudgments. Frost's unwillingness to accept absolute

statements is another source of difficulty. Professor Cox goes on to interpret in *his* way a number of Frost's recent poems, which seem to have perplexed earlier admirers.

"AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF Pause," by J. Milton Cowan and Bernard Bloch, in *American Speech* for April, 1948 (only recently issued), attempts to find relation between pauses and grammatical elements in an oration from a play "read" by the actor. Both electrical measurement of the pauses and ten trained persons' perception of them were used. The longest pauses were, of course, at sentence ends. The next longest ones set off appositives. Pauses separating co-ordinate elements were next in frequency to those marking sentence ends, but some co-ordinations were not marked by pauses. The investigators consider, but it seems inadequately, rhetorical reasons for pauses—for example, one phrase grammatically co-ordinate was probably parenthetical in the reciter's feeling. In any case, the advocates of punctuating by pauses will find little comfort in the article.

In the same magazine H. L. Mencken writes entertainingly of street names, a topic little discussed in print. Ralph H. Lane shows in a brief paper, "The Whole Meaning Has Changed," that *whole* is now frequently little more than an intensive, a vehicle for feeling. Its meaning of *sound* is almost obsolete, and the meaning *entire* is fading.

"A GLOSSARY OF THE NEW CRITICISM" is appearing in three instalments in the December through February issues of *Poetry*. William Elton, the compiler, begins by declaring: "It is safe to say by now that the New Criticism is really the New Orthodoxy." He and the editors of *Poetry* think that the time is ripe for definition of the terms (technical jargon?) used by the New Critics. *A* through *E* takes seven pages. More interesting than this description sounds. Sometimes Elton must arbitrate disagreements.

"SPARKS FROM THE ANVIL" by Winston Churchill in the January *Atlantic Monthly* contains excerpts from a book soon to be published under the title *Maxims and Reflections*. Among them is this statement: "I would make boys all learn English; and then I would let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour and Greek as a treat. But the only thing I would whip them for is not knowing English. I would whip them hard for that."

"THE NOVELIST DEALS WITH CHARACTER," by Arthur Koestler, and "Books, Beds, and Bromides," by Edmund Fuller, in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (January 1 and 8) are both interesting commentaries on the craft of the novelist. Koestler asks the question: "What do you mean when you say the character in a novel 'lives'?" shows that the images of *real* people in our memory are not so different from our images of *fictional* characters as we generally believe and why; and then describes some of the processes by which authors make their characters "live." Fuller categorizes amusingly the stock methods by which modern writers deal with the subject of sex and then goes on to his serious point—that if mediocre writers continue to debase the art of writing by substituting sensationalism for genuine exploration of human passion, the hard-won freedom under which artists now can write will be taken from them, and Mrs. Grundy will again hold sway.

"BOOBY TRAP" REPORTING BY THE *Chicago Tribune* in its "crusade" against Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Dartmouth is explicitly analyzed in Louis M. Lyons' article "Libelling Our Colleges." This also is in the January *Atlantic*. Point by point, Lyons takes *Tribune* statements, explores their sources, and shows how facts are distorted. Read it to get illustrations for teaching!

THE REINTERPRETATION AND REVITALIZATION OF GREEK MYTHS IN CONTEMPORARY

literature is discussed by Gilbert Highet in the winter issue of the *Virginia Quarterly*. This interesting development of classical influence in modern thought is going on in two different fields, one almost wholly literary and mainly dramatic; the other primarily psychological and philosophical. Highet begins by enunciating the three main principles on which the myths can be interpreted. "One is to say they describe *single historical facts*. The second is to take them as symbols of *permanent philosophical truths*. The third is to hold that they are reflections of *natural processes, eternally recurring*." In literature the retelling of the Greek myths in plays and stories has been most interesting in France, where they are used to make them carry contemporary moral and political significance. Highet thus discusses at some length the works of Gide, Jean Cocteau, Jean Giraudoux, Jean Anouilh, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In our own country, of course, the most recent example is Robinson Jeffers' poetic drama *Medea*, currently starring Judith Anderson.

IN "THE PRESENT STATE OF FICTION" Herschell Brickell, writing in the winter *Virginia Quarterly Review*, gives a very specific reason as to why he thinks our fiction lacks nourishment. It is because "the characters seem to have bodies, often very active bodies, which perform their natural functions successfully enough, but no minds to speak of, and certainly no souls." With no spiritual equipment, characters can hardly be expected to become involved in spiritual struggles. If neither good nor evil exists, where is the conflict? Man without his mind and soul has lost the dignity that has made him worthy of serious consideration as a subject for art. Brickell believes that fiction may well be abandoned as an art form unless there emerge novelists and short-story writers who believe profoundly that life and people are valuable and important. Writers who "do not hesitate to say so unequivocally and convincingly can confer a priceless boon upon this troubled period."

## Books

### A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERARY HISTORY

Whether so intended or not, Professor Jones's history of American literary history might stand as a prolegomenon and justification of the three-volume *Literary History of the United States* which has recently been published. Why the author calls his book *The Theory of American Literature*<sup>1</sup> is not obvious to this reviewer; it appears rather to be an account of the development of a theory of literary history, with special reference to literature produced in the United States. As the author states in his Preface, such a thorough examination of American literary history has not before been made available to students.

Professor Jones deplors the quarrel between recent critics and the literary historians, and he adopts Bacon's theory that the historian should study the chief books of each generation against their social background, so that "the Literary Spirit of each age may be charmed, as it were, from the dead." From the beginning America has had a strong sense of history, and there was much writing done in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but no serious attempt at literary history until Samuel L. Knapp's lectures on *American Literature* in 1829. This was also the year of Kettell's *Specimens of American Poetry*, the earliest important collection. These works reflect the debate which went on during the first half of the nineteenth century between those who demanded a native American literature and those who acknowledged writing in this country to be a by-product of English literature. The author is convinced that the course of American literary development was not

wholly determined by this debate but was influenced also by the theories of such European critics as Sismondi, Friedrich Schlegel, and Mme de Staël.

The Anglophile tradition was revived after the Civil War, and through the development of strong departments of English literature and philology (under the influence of German scholarship) it became a barrier to the introduction of American literature in the colleges. Three important literary histories were published between 1875 and 1900 by M. C. Tyler, C. F. Richardson, and Barrett Wendell, all of which, though otherwise excellent, reflected the English bias. Tyler rendered great service particularly by bringing to light much neglected writing in the earlier periods.

The latest phase of American literary history begins with Macy's *Spirit of American Literature* (1913) and is distinguished by the *Cambridge History* (1920), Parrington's *Main Currents* (1927), the *Reinterpretation* (1928), and numerous lesser works. Professor Jones clearly looks to the new *Literary History of the United States* to mark the close of an epoch in literary history. American scholars in this field, he concludes, have sought a formula rather than the solution of a metaphysical problem. They have tried to answer the question: What has been the relation of literature to society in the United States? Hence they have devoted more attention to literature in its sociological relations than to literature as a record of sensibility. More of the latter is called for, and the critic and the historian are asked to settle their difference. "Whenever literary history abandons evaluation, it becomes archaeological and dry; whenever literary criticism neglects history, it grows absolute and inhuman."

The book is thoroughly documented and very readable for a work of this kind. It will

<sup>1</sup> Howard Mumford Jones, *The Theory of American Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948. Pp. 208. \$2.75.



be of great value as a guide to the study of the theory and development of literary history in the United States. It should also stimulate further research in this field.

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### A LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The need for a work such as the *Literary History of the United States*<sup>1</sup> is less apparent in 1948 than was the need for the *Cambridge History of American Literature* in 1917. Thirty-one years ago the teachers of American literature were locked in a struggle with the teachers of English literature to secure, not merely parity for their subject as a discipline, but even some respect for American writers as thinkers and artists. Today, in the minds of all but a few academic armadillos, that battle has been won, and the author of a dissertation on Melville may hold his head quite as high as the author of one on Martin Marprelate. The victory belongs chiefly to the generation of literary artists which has gained eminence in this country since 1917; contemporary English writers may offer as much, but, unfavored by economic and political circumstance, they have not gained here so much esteem. Popular pressure exerted on the curricula of public school and college has brought American literature into its own, and as the English product fades, the vista for our native literature expands and glows with light. Today it is not necessary for American scholars to match the models provided in a pretentious and stuffy fourteen-volume Ward and Waller history of English literature for justification—American literature itself has justified them.

<sup>1</sup> *Literary History of the United States*. Edited by Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Seidel Canby; Associates: Howard Mumford Jones, Dixon Wecter, and Stanley T. Williams. New York: Macmillan Co., 1948. 3 vols. \$20.00. Vol. III (Bibliography), separately, \$7.50.

In 1948 our need is for illumination of an *established* literature: new critical approaches and insights into what we are familiar with, new perceptions gained from the examination of peripheral materials, new evaluations. And as scholars we need to have the critical and scholarly work of the last thirty-one years brought together for us. Conscientious industry, joint or otherwise, should be able to produce an adequate scholarly apparatus; but is a major effort of this sort desirable for its insights and vision? Assuredly yes, if we will be content with the foreseeable results. Could we expect, were we the editors of a weekly literary magazine with the most satisfactory standards we could formulate, more than four or five truly excellent lead articles in a year and a half of publishing? The *Literary History of the United States*, with its eighty-one chapters, has this degree of excellence at the very least; I am inclined to the opinion that it is even more successful than would be the critical journal we have hypothesized. Randolph Adams' "Reports and Chronicles," Gilbert Chinard's "The American Dream," Stanley Williams' "Washington Irving," H. L. Mencken's "The American Language," Arthur Hudson's "Folklore," Harold Thompson's "Humor," William Charvat's "Literature as Business," J. W. Krutch's "Eugene O'Neill," Malcolm Cowley's "How Writers Lived," and Maxwell Geismar's "A Cycle of Fiction" are essays that justify the publisher for the considerable expense of this great venture and the editors for their five-year sacrifice of ease.

Another merit is the uniform excellence of the style. I know of no other work by many hands that can match the *Literary History* in this regard. It is the product, however, of somewhat arbitrary controls imposed on the whole enterprise. Why was it felt necessary that the 1391 pages should form a continuous narrative? Would not the ordinary user be more likely to consult the work for its treatment of a single subject than to read it from beginning to end? Zeal has lifted the style, but it has also killed the spirit that produces penetrating and endur-

ing criticism. One of the deficiencies of the *Literary History* is the lack of true distinction in the essays dealing with the subjects that should have inspired the best efforts—the major American writers. The blue pencil is not wholly responsible for this; the real cause seems to have been the authors' desire to meet the editors' conception of a kind of chastened and controlled over-all effect. No more difficult situation could have been invented for the free functioning of the critical imagination, and inadequacy is the consequence. The essays on such provocative figures as Emerson, Whitman, and Mark Twain are flatly disappointing; the study of Henry James deserves no other epithet than "obscurantist"; and one cannot conceive why contributors with so little sympathy for their subjects as the authors of the Poe and Howells essays were selected for these assignments. May not the Griswold-like innuendo of the Poe article be but a perverted expression of the exasperation of a competent man at the controls imposed on him? Significantly, two of the better treatments of the major figures, the Melville and the Henry Adams essays, are by two of the editors who, presumptively, were less conscious of the restraints since they were self-imposed. One regrets the unhappy bedding of Sidney Lanier and Emily Dick-

inson in the same chapter, called "Experiments in Poetry"; the capable author of that chapter says that "conscious plan in the poetry of Emily Dickinson is almost negligible" (a curious lack in an "experimenter"), and obviously the design is not his. Self-indulgence has allowed one editor more space to expatiate on the "Defenders of Ideality" than the actual accomplishment of Stoddard, Stedman, and their ilk would seem to warrant. And the sectioning of the whole work under the curious titles chosen is hardly philosophical.

Yet the staggering task of organizing the half-million facts contained in the *Literary History* doubtless bred the controls which limit the work, and one would be short both of understanding and charity who did not recognize this. Moreover, if the deficiencies are totaled, they probably do not exceed those in any comparable large undertaking; it is where they occur that is lamentable. They are compensated for, however, with the real students of our literature by the excellence of the peripheral studies. We must have recourse to these and to the incontestably invaluable bibliographies (despite their poor indexing) for a long time to come.

OSCAR CARGILL

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

## Brief Reviews

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

### FOR THE GENERAL READER

*Thunder on the River.* By CHARLTON LAIRD. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$2.75.

In 1813 Mark Eldridge, nineteen, left college and Vermont for the frontier, where he took a job with a fur-trader on the Upper Mississippi. This led to Indian fighting, and he was taken prisoner and adopted as a son by Black Hawk, whom he in time liked and admired. He married an Indian girl. A story of adventure, of Indians, and of the pioneers who took cruel advantage of the "savages," who were incited by both French and English against the settlers.

*Dream in the Stone.* By DANA FARALLA. Messner. \$3.00.

The scene of this story is a Jutland fisher village. A perceptive study of the beauty of sea and moor, of

the love of a boy and a girl, of a boy's love for a horse, of a woman's love for a cruel, strange artist, of good versus evil in the same person, of the power of courage and faith. Superstitions and the moods induced by the sea, the shoals, and reefs are always in the background.

*High Towers.* By THOMAS B. COSTAIN. Doubleday. \$3.00.

A long, rich historical novel embracing the fur trade in New France, the John Law bubble in Louisiana, and the French in New Orleans. The ten Le Moyne brothers and Philippe Girard provide adventure and romance.

*The Jacaranda Tree.* By H. E. BATES. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$2.75.

When Burma was invaded by the Japs, the manager of a British-owned rice mill, a group of Brit-

ishers, and two devoted Burmese fled in two cars on the long journey to India. A story of spiritual courage, physical sufferings, cowardice, and emotional entanglements, skilfully told.

*Southern Cross.* By BRIGID KNIGHT. Doubleday. \$3.00.

Until she was nine years old, Elizabeth lived with an English family in South Africa, but her parents were Dutch. She married a Boer, but she could not hate the English. A story of personal conflict and of conflict between nationalities. Interesting, timely.

*Cheaper by the Dozen.* By FRANK B. GILBRETH, JR., and ERNESTINE GILBRETH CAREY. Crowell. \$3.00.

Gay reminiscences of the twelve Gilbreth children. The father was an efficiency expert, the mother was competent; the family life was boisterous to the nth degree. Co-selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club for January.

*The Integrated Life.* By THOMAS P. BEYER. University of Minnesota Press. \$3.00.

The collection, chronologically ordered, covers many years. There are personal essays, essays of literary appreciation, and papers on the teaching of English. Dr. Beyer has long been associated with Hamline University as professor of English and as head of the department. In "At His Beddes Heed Twenty Bookes" he names twenty books of which he says: "Without these books I should not be . . . out of these largely has come my faith. . . I am tempted to name another twenty or fifty without which I should be crippled."

*The Grand Design.* By JOHN DOS PASSOS. Houghton. \$3.50.

Dos Passos has created a fictional New Deal, but of his many characters some are strangely familiar. The illusions of the New Deal are in free-verse sections; the politics, the greed and graft, the feuds, gossip, and scandals of New Deal Washington, the portraits of the women who thronged to the capital, the voice on the radio, are in Dos Passos prose. A disturbing picture of the New Deal at its worst—and a few people at their best. Ironical.

*The Golden Net.* By RUBY REDINGER. Crown. \$3.00.

Marcia Anderson has accepted a position in the English department of a midwestern college. Marcia is a sensitive, well-meaning person, inexperienced and much confused by the adjustments she is forced to make as a faculty member in campus life. There are students whom she would like to advise, faculty members to admire and others whom she cannot esteem, and a dominating rich man who controls the college with whom she may fall in love. A shrewd, critical (narrow?) study of college life and the academic world.

*Hound-Dog Man.* By FRED GIPSON. Harper. \$2.50.

A rather fascinating story of a twelve-year-old boy's first coon hunt. The "hound-dog man" was quite a character but just the sort to appeal to an adventure-loving boy who tells the story in the right idiom. January co-selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

*Mary Wakefield.* By MAZO DE LA ROCHE. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$3.00.

Many readers will remember the Jalna series. Chronologically this is the second of the family stories. Mary Wakefield comes from England to act as governess to Philip's motherless children. Of course she marries Philip. A typical Jalna story—light and pleasant.

*Information Please Almanac, 1949.* Edited by JOHN KIERAN. Farrar, Straus. \$2.50.

This is the third yearly Kieran almanac. A record of the year's events in nearly a thousand pages, compiled and written by experts in various fields. Ninety per cent new and revised material. A section on "How Man Lives under Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism." Charts, maps, illustrations.

*Earth's Grandest Rivers.* By FERDINAND C. LANE. Doubleday. \$3.50.

Companion volume to the author's *The World's Great Lakes*. The beginnings and history of the world's great rivers and their effect upon civilization and life—past, present, and probably future.

*The Theory of American Literature.* By HOWARD MUMFORD JONES. Cornell University Press. \$2.75.

In its original form this book consisted of six lectures—the "Messenger Lectures on the Evolution of Civilization," delivered at Cornell University in 1947. Mr. Jones says: "As a reader I think that books are made for men, not men for books; that we read for direct pleasure, for simple statement; and that except in university reviews the human animal takes the printed page calmly and not as a problem in chemistry." This statement follows a discussion of the energy the "critics have devoted to hunting out recondite meanings in poems that have sometimes had those meanings, and to discovering myth in prose that comes to carry metaphysical burdens its author may not have intended."

*To Make the People Strong.* By A. EDWARD STUNTZ. Macmillan. \$3.50.

A study of the co-operation between our country and our South American neighbors—our Good Neighbor policy—which has resulted in better health conditions, improved transportation, agricultural developments, and better schools. Mr. Stuntz traveled from Mexico to Lake Titicaca, to Uruguay, to Haiti, to Rio de Janeiro, over the Andes to

Santiago and Chile. He is now with the American International Association for Economic and Social Development in Venezuela.

*The Great Tradition.* By F. R. LEAVIS. George W. Stewart. \$4.50.

Dr. Leavis, fellow of Downing College and editor of *Scrutiny Magazine*, asserts that there are but four great English novelists—Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. He examines critically the part in the Great Tradition played by George Eliot, James, and Conrad. Because of "special circumstances differentiating" Jane Austen, she is not discussed.

*Charles Du Bos and English Literature: A Critic and His Orientation.* By ANGELO PHILIP BERTOCCHI. King's Crown Press. \$3.75.

Of the writings of the French critic, dead in 1939 at the age of fifty-seven, Bertocci says: "Few individuals will have revealed with such penetration and completeness what for Charles Du Bos alone mattered: the inner life. . . . In the end . . . he remains himself . . . straining to be all embracing, joining the natural and the supernatural, intense in his *equilibrium on tiptoes*."

*T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands.* Edited by B. RAJAN. Funk & Wagnalls. \$3.00.

Foreword: "This book, while including an essay on Mr. Eliot's criticism, is intended chiefly to serve as a reasonably detailed introduction to his poetry." Included are an analysis of *The Waste Land*, by Cleanth Brooks, and one of *Ash Wednesday*, by E. E. Duncan Jones. Much space is devoted to *Four Quartets*, and there is an essay by M. C. Bradbrook on "Eliot's Critical Method." "His Philosophical Themes," "A Question of Speech," and *Gerontion* are also discussed.

*Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature.* By ROBERT H. ELIAS. Knopf. \$4.00.

An intimate and definitive biography. An interpretive study of the life and work of Dreiser as he was influenced by moral, religious, and financial problems. A discussion of Dreiser's conflicting points of view at different times in his life and of what seems to Mr. Elias an "underlying consistency of purpose."

*China: The Land and the People.* By GERALD F. WINFIELD. Sloane. \$5.00.

"A basic book on the problem of modern China; the portrait of a nation and the anatomy of its crises." Dr. Winfield has lived in China as a research biologist for thirteen years. The problem of China's health and well-being, the conquest of disease, depend, his investigations prove, upon agricultural, social, cultural, educational, industrial, and political

changes. He speaks the Chinese language and has studied at close contact both workers in many fields and the national leaders. End maps and photographs.

*North from Mexico: The Spanish-speaking People of the United States.* By CAREY MCWILLIAMS. "Peoples of America Series," edited by LOUIS ADAMIC. Lippincott. \$4.00.

"Beginning with the early legend and fact of Anglo-Hispano culture, this book covers a sweeping drama of events and people in the border lands of Mexico and the United States." It covers the time of the early Spanish explorers, the era of migration northward, and the contributions to art, language, and the war efforts made by the present two-and-a-half-million Spanish-speaking Americans, who provide a problem in racial discrimination and minority rights.

*Guide to America.* Edited by ELMER JENKINS. Public Affairs Press. \$5.00.

Graphic maps of each state, leading reference books, descriptions of state and national forests, reservations, agricultural stations, game sanctuaries, cities, towns, art centers, educational institutions, etc. Issued in co-operation with the American Automobile Association. 705 pages. Small print.

*Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary.* By ERIC PARTRIDGE. Dutton. \$7.50.

By the author of *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. The essay covers bawdy references, and the Glossary cites significant and important passages, with definitions and explanations of all the terms. Special emphasis upon hidden allusions and multiple meanings.

*Michigan and the Cleveland Era.* Edited by EARL D. BABST and LEWIS G. VANDER VELDE. University of Michigan Press. \$2.50.

Sketches of University of Michigan staff members and alumni who served the Cleveland administrations, 1885-89 and 1893-97. A group of the university alumni have collaborated to show how one university has provided from among its graduates and faculty members many leaders in important public affairs, thus providing further evidence that American higher education "justifies by its output" its establishment and support. End papers and photographs.

*Edwin Arlington Robinson.* By EMERY NEFF. Sloane. \$3.00.

Second volume in the "American Men of Letters Series." The board of editors—Joseph Wood Krutch, Margaret Marshall, Lionel Trilling, and Mark Van Doren—report: "This is the first book about Robinson to combine in just proportions the exciting story



of his life and the no less exciting story of his poetic development. Both are one story and Mr. Neff has penetrated to the secret of each subject as if it were something altogether unique." Mr. Neff was personally acquainted with Robinson and many of his poet friends.

*Shake Well before Using.* By BENNETT CERF. Simon & Schuster. \$2.95.

By the author of *Try and Stop Me*. A very funny and clever collection of anecdotes. Illustrations by Carl Rose. A much-needed book of cheer.

*The Reader's Encyclopedia.* Edited by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT. Crowell. Pp. 1242. Plain, \$6.00; thumb-indexed, \$6.75.

"An encyclopedia of world literature and the arts," this is a splendid handbook for imperfectly educated persons or for well-educated wide readers. Characters, books, authors, literary movements, myths, and even important historical and cultural backgrounds are easily found and sufficiently explained.

"Soviet Interpretation of Contemporary American Literature." By M. MENDELSON. Translated from the Russian by DEMING B. BROWN and RUFUS W. MATHEWSON. Washington 8, D.C.: Public Affairs Press (2153 Florida Avenue). Mimeographed. Pp. 28. \$0.50.

This lecture, delivered in Moscow under government auspices, angers and depresses one. The persistent misinterpretation and frequent misrepresentation provoke anger. One is depressed by the truth of some of the uncomplimentary remarks and disheartened by the Soviet view of America—perhaps the more ominous, the more sincere it is.

*Piazza Tales.* By HERMAN MELVILLE. Edited by EGBERT S. OLIVER. Hendricks House, Farrar & Straus. \$3.50.

This second volume in what is to be a complete set of Melville's works contains six magazine stories written between 1853 and 1856—after *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* failed to sell: "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," "The Bell Tower," "The Piazza," "The Lightning-Rod Man," and the series of short sketches called "The Encantadas, or The Enchanted Islands."

*UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy.* By JULIAN HUXLEY. Washington 8, D.C.: Public Affairs Press (2153 Florida Avenue). Pp. 73. Paper, \$2.00.

Practically an official pronouncement, coming from the director of UNESCO. Written with his usual clarity and with his usual scientific-philosophical approach.

*The Dry Mock: A Study of Irony in Drama.* By ALAN REYNOLDS THOMPSON. University of California Press. \$3.75.

In chapter i the author discusses the nature of irony from the vernacular slang to the sublimity of Sophocles. The forms of irony he classifies under three heads—those of speech, character, and events. He analyzes at length the Greek dramatists and Ibsen. In the concluding chapter he discusses the limitations of irony. Of particular interest are the uses of irony by Pirandello, Molière, Shaw, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Ibsen.

*English Literature and Ideas in the Twentieth Century: An Inquiry into Present Difficulties and Future Prospects.* By H. V. ROUTH. Longmans.

"Is literature dying out," asks the British critic, "or is it entering upon a new life too big to be mastered without half a century of unsuccessful endeavor?" He discusses the most prominent English authors of our century "in relation to the ideas which fermented in their heads" and looks ahead hopefully. Routh's outlook and tone were shown in his "The Quest for Currents in Contemporary English Literature" in the *English Journal* and *College English* year before last.

*Collected Poems.* By SIEGFRIED SASSOON. Viking. \$3.50.

The volume begins with bitter poems of World War I and closes with defiant poems of World War II. There is much social protest and considerable grasping for beauty and exultation in life. Rather old-fashioned in form, the verses frequently rhyme and are full of "propositional statements"; practically all are clear at first reading.

*Wordlore.* By DUANE CLAYTON BARNES. Dutton. \$2.25.

A "popular" book of word origins, grouped according to similarities of history, and each history presented in a paragraph rather than with dictionary concision. Interesting browsing ground for teacher or student.

#### FOR THE TEACHER

*Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent.* By HERMAN MELVILLE. Edited by ELEANOR MELVILLE METCALF. Harvard University Press. Pp. 189. \$3.75.

A hitherto unpublished journal kept by Melville, between the publication of the *White Jacket* and *Moby Dick*. Important for its revelation of his growth as a literary artist.

*The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne.* By ERNEST NEVIN DILWORTH. Columbia University Press. \$2.25.

Written to the point that Sterne, instead of being the prince of sentimentalists, never for a moment

stopped playing the clown and that his whole work is a masterly parody of the sentimental tradition.

*The Triumph of Form.* By WALLACE CABLE BROWN. University of North Carolina Press. Pp. 212. \$3.50.

A study of the later masters of the heroic couplet: Gay, Johnson, Churchill, Young, Cowper, Goldsmith, and Crabbe.

*The Miraculous Birth of Language.* By RICHARD ALBERT WILSON. Preface by GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. Philosophical Library. Pp. 256. \$3.75.

A philosophical exposition of language in which language is treated as one step or cycle in the evolution of the world, and its primary importance, above economics or chemistry or any other material factors, is shown.

*Twentieth Century Speech and Voice Correction.* Edited by EMIL FROESCHELS. Philosophical Library. Pp. 321.

The latest developments in methods of speech and voice correction discussed by nineteen specialists in the field.

*General Education in the Social Studies.* By ALBERT WILLIAM LEVI. American Council on Education. Pp. 336. \$3.50.

A detailed report of how various colleges tackled the problem of designing a two-year basic integrated course in the social studies.

*Integration of the Humanities and the Social Sciences.* University Press in Dallas, Southern Methodist University. Pp. 92. \$2.00.

A symposium of papers read at a conference held at Southern Methodist University in November, 1947, for the purpose of seeking ways of integrating the two fields of knowledge.

*Wellsprings of the American Spirit.* Edited by F. ERNEST JOHNSON. Harper. Pp. 241. \$2.50.

A series of papers, given for and published by the Institute for Religious and Social Studies, which examine the various forms of expression in which Americans have made explicit the values of the democratic tradition.

*How To Speak Better English.* By NORMAN LEWIS. Crowell. Pp. 306. \$3.00.

This is what normally might be termed a book written for the "popular" trade, but grammar teachers prone to be purists might well look into it. Lewis' premise is that language is a living, changing thing and that grammar offers solutions to its problems. His method is to start with the problem, discuss it, then sum it up with a short rule supplemented by the opinions of famous writers on current usage. The result is that grammar is presented neither as a museum piece nor as a jailer.

*Modern English and Its Heritage.* By MARGARET M. BRYANT. Macmillan. Pp. 406. \$5.00.

A comprehensive text for the study of the English language, yet written simply enough for ready comprehension by lay readers interested in the present and the past of English. Part I, "The Heritage of Modern English" (historical and comparative); Part II, "The Speech Sound and the Letter"; Part III, "Grammar and Usage"; Part IV, "Word Formation" (including changes and semantics).

*American Studies.* By TREMAINE McDOWELL. University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 96. \$1.50.

The author advocates a *program* rather than a department of American studies, a program made up of courses and teachers in a number of departments; and he thinks the pattern applicable in other fields besides American civilization and culture. He writes from personal investigation of work in more than thirty colleges and from experience in directing one of the most extensive of such programs. Theory developed from practice; a vision of possibilities based upon actualities.

#### FOR THE STUDENT

*Speaking in Public.* By ARLEIGH B. WILLIAMSON, CHARLES A. FRITZ, and HAROLD RAYMOND ROSS. 2d ed. Prentice-Hall. Pp. 400. \$3.50.

Many changes and added chapters on argumentation, radio speaking, and reading from manuscript make this a new book.

*Readings for Our Times, Vol. II.* By HAROLD BLODGETT and BURGESS JOHNSON. 2d ed. Ginn. Pp. 780. \$3.75.

Includes novelettes, short stories, poetry, drama, with few changes from the first edition but rather numerous additions.

*Twenty-five Modern Plays.* Edited by S. MARION TUCKER. Revised by ALAN S. DOWNER. Harper. Pp. 1000. \$4.75.

Considerable content change from the first edition issued almost twenty years ago. Purpose the same—to make available a representative selection from the repertory of modern drama.

*The Indiana Student Writes.* Published by the English Department, State Teachers College, Indiana, Pa. Pp. 65.

A collection of short stories and narrative sketches written in English courses by students at State Teachers College, Indiana, Pennsylvania. Illustrated by students in the art department. Some of the writing is excellent, and, for the purpose of comparison, all of it will interest teachers and students in other colleges.

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